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Profit, Victory  
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The Lees of Hong Kong

*by Vivienne Poy*



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# Profit, Victory & Sharpness

## The Lees of Hong Kong

*by Vivienne Poy*

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*This book is dedicated to  
all the descendants of Richard Charles Lee*



## Hong Kong Life Stories: Series Editors' Preface

Hong Kong has evolved from a colonial port on the China coast to a major centre of the global economy and a metropolis with a distinct way of life, over the six decades since the Second World War. It is undoubtedly a Chinese society; it is also an open, pluralistic and civil society. Social and cultural development has gone hand in hand with the economic, but has been much less well documented in the scholarly literature or the popular press.

Many men and women contributed to the making of Hong Kong society. Some were rich and famous, or did great deeds which were recorded in print or on stone. Most just struggled quietly to survive in difficult conditions, to maintain their self-respect, and to raise their children. The life stories of these men and women give us a deeper, fuller understanding of the evolution of Hong Kong.

In this series, we plan to publish Hong Kong life stories from diverse perspectives. There will be books in a variety of genres, such as autobiographies, biographies, oral histories and collections of representative works. With these publications, we hope to further the aims of the Canada and Hong Kong Research Project, viz., to chronicle the development of Hong Kong and to make Hong Kong better understood in Canada. The authors are responsible for their own opinions, which do not necessarily represent those of the Project or the editors.

This volume consists of the biographies of Lee Hysan and his son Richard Charles Lee Ming Chak, written by Canadian Senator Vivienne Poy, devoted daughter of the latter. The Lees are one of the most eminent families in Hong Kong, distinguished by their phenomenal successes in business and no less by their public service. The rise of Lee Hysan from pupil teacher at Queen's College to being one of the most prominent Chinese merchants in early twentieth-century Hong Kong was a spectacular example of commercial relations in the colonial entrepôt. The multifaceted career of his son Lee Ming Chak led the way in Hong Kong's industrialization and modernization during the half century straddling the Second World War. Educated in the Chinese classics in Hong Kong, and in Western culture and civil engineering at Oxford, he enjoyed remarkable achievements in engineering, business, Freemasonry, community service, social advocacy and politics. In all these spheres of

endeavour, his clever, imaginative and principled approach earned him the respect of his community. Maintaining constructive relations with colonialists and nationalists, with capitalists and communists, and with international friends and partners from around the world, he remained true to his Confucian-humanistic values and to his Hong Kong Chinese identity. His web of personal and business ties illustrates the polynodal connections of an important segment of the Hong Kong élites during the second half of the twentieth century. This intelligent and absorbing portrait, set in the broader context of Hong Kong and Chinese history, helps to illuminate many dimensions of the society which four generations of Lees have called home.

October 2006

Diana Lary  
Bernard Luk  
Series Editors

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Special thanks to Dr. Li Qiu Yun whose calligraphy of my surname is on the cover of this book.

To all the above named, I owe my greatest gratitude.



## Prologue

My Chinese surname *Lee* means “Profit in Business, Victory in Wars and the Sharpness of a Blade.” Not only does the name belong to a very small group of the Chinese population; it is unusual in that many in China have not heard of it, and most people with that surname are related to us. In China, names were given to families by the Emperor thousands of years ago. My curiosity about its origin brought about the research and writing of this book.

Another equally good reason for writing this book is my fascination with the lives of my ancestors. In many ways, their experiences reflected the development of the Chinese people in modern times. Beginning with my great-grandfather, their lives in Hong Kong also mirrored the development of Hong Kong from a rocky island with very few inhabitants to an international financial centre. Writing this book has been like writing the history of modern China and Hong Kong, on a very personal level.

For most of us, finding our roots is like finding ourselves. Why is it so important? I believe that we need to know who we are before we can move forward with our lives and be productive members of society.

This book is relevant not only to members of my family, but also to many others who will find it nostalgic; those from Hong Kong as well as from China whose families had similar experiences to those of my ancestors. Others will be able to draw parallels in their own families’ histories.

It is my wish that this book will contribute to the study of the history of Hong Kong as well as of modern China, through a narrative of the story of one family.



## CHAPTER 1

### Prince of Zhau

**A**s a little girl, whenever I bowed to my ancestors in our ancestral hall in the Big House, I was fascinated by the plaque on the altar that is inscribed with the origin of my family. My ancestors originated in Henan Province in northern China, then moved to southwestern China. In recent times, they moved to Sunwui in Guangdong Province, and subsequently to Hong Kong.

According to our ancestral records, we trace our ancestry as far back as the Chou dynasty. In 1122 B.C.E., Chou displaced Shang as the ruling dynasty in China (1122-255 B.C.E.). Ji Fa became the emperor and assumed the title of “Wu Wang,” the Martial Emperor. His father, Ji Chang, was consecrated as “Wen Wang,” the Cultural Emperor. That was when feudalism reached its highest degree of development.

One of Emperor Chou Wu Wang’s teachers was a man by the name of Chou Hung, my remote ancestor. During the reign of Emperor Chou Sing Wang (1115-1078 B.C.E.), the emperor wanted to reward the descendants of the teacher Chou Hung. Chou Hung’s great-grandson, Hung Yik, was granted the feudal kingdom of Zhau at Ging Zhau, which is the southwest section of present-day Szechwan Province. Lai Zhen, son of Hung Yik, the Prince of the Kingdom of Zhau, later was assigned the area along the Lee River in present-day Sichuan Province as his feudatory, and Lee was designated by the Emperor as Lai Zhen’s family name.

Throughout our family’s history, a number of our Lee ancestors have contributed to and glorified the times in which they lived. During the Ch’in dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.), General Lee Gai helped Shan Yu, emperor of Sai Zhau, who, with his accomplice, the commoner Liu Bang, put an end to the Ch’in dynasty of Shi Huang Di, the first emperor of China. Liu Bang then defeated Shan Yu and became the first emperor of the Han dynasty. Shan Yu committed suicide and General Lee Gai was conscripted into Liu Bang’s army. However, Lee Gai could not remain loyal to the new emperor and was subsequently defeated by him. The

emperor, nevertheless, pardoned Lee Gai and gave him a piece of land to till for the rest of his life.

During the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), Lee Chien was mentioned in many historical documents as the highest minister to Emperor Chung San, the grandson of Emperor Liu Bang. Lee Chun Lum was a high court official, the equivalent of a prime minister. Lee Zhen Yuan was a famous religious leader in the Eastern Han dynasty (25-221 C.E.). During the dynasty of Eastern Tsin (317-420 C.E.) in southern China, Lee Ro was the secretary of state.

At the time of the T'ang dynasty (618-907 C.E.), there were 198 surnames in China. Lee was one of the five surnames in Yiunan and one of the five surnames in Honan (Yiunan and Honan form the present-day Henan Province). Lee Kai gained distinction as a great literary figure by being the calligrapher of the well-known inscription in the T'ang pagoda, Yan Ta.

Lee Shen was a renowned intellectual and philosopher in the Sung dynasty (960-1279 C.E.). During the Ming dynasty (1368-1643 C.E.), Lee Ben Chen contributed greatly to social and national security, and was instrumental in stopping invaders on the Chinese border.

During the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911 C.E.), in the twenty-third year of Emperor Tao Kuang (1843), Lee Yi Quan sat for the imperial examination and passed as Jin Shi (a successful candidate of the national civil service examination held at the imperial capital). He was appointed High Minister, and the event was described on a stone tablet in an important temple.<sup>1</sup>

From the time of Lai Zhen to the end of the Sung dynasty, over a period of almost twenty-five hundred years, the Lee family expanded from the Lee River in present-day Sichuan Province to Nam Hung in Kwangtung Province in southern China. During the lifetime of ancestor Lee Ken Long, son of Teh Chao, there was a mass migration of the entire population of Nam Hung Fu to Kwang Chou Fu in Guangdong Province. This occurred in the Southern Sung period (1127-1279 C.E.) near the end of the Sung dynasty. In our ancestral record, there are three different versions of the reason for this resettlement.

According to the first version, Emperor Whe (1265-75 C.E.) in Southern Sung had a favourite consort, Lady So. She was very beautiful but had an unpleasant disposition. This made the emperor most unhappy

and his health suffered. Lady So was, therefore, banished to a remote part of the palace and was not allowed to communicate with the emperor.

Lady So decided to flee, dressed as a traveller. As she was about to leave Hang Chou, the capital of Southern Sung, she met a wealthy merchant called Wong at the pier. Wong was from Nam Hung Fu and had come to the capital to deliver shipments of provisions. He was on his way home when he met the disguised Lady So. She approached his boat and spoke to him at length. She asked to accompany him as his wife, and told him her name was Cheung. Impressed by her beauty, Wong took her home with him, not realizing that she was the emperor's consort.

Time passed. The emperor decided to recall Lady So from banishment. When he discovered that she had escaped, he was very angry. He sent messengers to look for her, but they were not able to find her. Meanwhile, in Wong's household, one of the servants had discovered that the wife the master had brought back from the capital was none other than the emperor's consort. The secret was out.

When the emperor heard the news, there was great fear in Nam Hung Fu. It was decided that, for the emperor to save face, an excuse would have to be made that there were bandits there, and soldiers would be sent to kill the entire population.

One family with the surname Law, in Nam Hung Fu, had a son-in-law called Leung, who was an official in the capital. Leung heard of the impending disaster and immediately sent a messenger to his in-laws to tell them that they must leave the area immediately. Ninety-seven families from fifty-eight villages got together to apply for permission from the authorities to leave, saying that it was too difficult to make a living in Nam Hung Fu and, therefore, they wished to move further south where the land was more fertile. They submitted their application on the tenth day of the first moon. On the fifteenth day of the fourth moon, in the ninth year of Hum Shun in Southern Sung (1274 C.E.), the entire village migrated to Kwang Chou Fu, with the exception of Lee Ken Long's family and Leung's family. Because the heads of these two families were officials in the central government, they were not in any danger. Ken Long was a scholar who held a position equivalent to that of a senator in the capital.

The second version of the migration story concerns a very powerful high court official named Gar Si Doh, who lived in Southern Sung. One



day he was to accompany the emperor to the temple to pray. General Wu asked the emperor which horse he would like to ride, and he replied, Siu Yin Zi. Gar Si Doh was angry with General Wu because he had not been asked first. He pretended to be ill and excused himself from accompanying the emperor. When the emperor heard that Gar Si Doh was upset, he dismissed General Wu. General Wu's sister, Lady Wu, who was one of the emperor's consorts and mother of his son, was sent to a nunnery.

The years went by and the empress had no son. The emperor decided to move his son by Lady Wu to the East Palace and make him Crown Prince. The court officials, however, advised the emperor that the crown prince must have his mother near him and that Lady Wu must be recalled from the nunnery. At this point, it was discovered that Lady Wu had not gone to the nunnery, but had sought refuge with the villagers of Nam Hung Fu. When the villagers learned that the emperor wanted to recall Lady Wu to court, they were afraid and gathered together to make application to leave in the ninth year of Hum Shun.

The third version of the story also concerns Gar Si Doh, but the details vary. In the eighth month of the ninth year of Hum Shun in Southern Sung, the emperor chose a date to pray in a famous temple. He asked the education minister, Gar Si Doh, to accompany him. When General Wu Yu Jo prepared the wagon, it was raining very hard. Gar Si Doh asked General Wu to wait until the rain had stopped before proceeding. General Wu, however, gave the emperor the impression that Gar Si Doh did not want to accompany him. The emperor went to pray alone. Minister Gar took this as a slight to his position and resigned. The emperor was distressed by the misunderstanding caused by General Wu and had him imprisoned. General Wu's sister, Lady Wu, who was one of the emperor's consorts, tried to save her brother, but her efforts resulted in her own banishment from court.

When she left the court, Lady Wu met a prosperous businessman who brought her to his home in Chu Gai Lai in Nam Hung Fu. However, when he discovered who she was, he refused to allow her to spend the night. Having no place to stay, Lady Wu fell into the hands of strangers and was molested. Alone and friendless, she drowned herself in a river. When the emperor heard about her suicide, the villagers in Nam Hung Fu were afraid, and they banded together to make application to leave.



Nine years later, in 1283, after Kublai Khan succeeded in conquering the entire country, the Sung dynasty was replaced by the Yuan dynasty, and there was unrest all over the land. Lee Ken Long decided to move his family south to Kwang Chou Fu to rejoin the villagers and settled in Sai Far Kue in the city of Sunwui. The family lived there for ten years and later moved to Sunning.

When he died, Lee Ken Long was buried in Sunning on a very good plot of land. His descendants were not prosperous and, blaming the burial plot for their lack of prosperity, they sold it to a family by the name of Yu. When prosperity returned to later descendants, they decided the burial plot was lucky after all and bought it back. The importance of the burial site is repeatedly mentioned in our ancestral book.<sup>2</sup>

The Lee River has since dried up and no longer appears on the map of China.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lee Family ancestral records.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

### Gold Mountain

**D**uring the Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911), in the twenty-second year of the reign of Tao Kuang (1841) on the twenty-second day of the third moon, my great-grandfather, Lee Leung Yik, was born into a humble family in the village of Hoiping in Kwangtung Province in southern China. Great-grandmother was born in 1850, on the twenty-sixth day of the sixth moon. Together they had four sons and two daughters. The family lived in Sui Jiang Hang, in the village of Hoiping, which consisted of twenty to thirty families.

Life was hard for the villagers. The houses were small, dark and dingy with earthen floors. The villagers worked from dawn to dusk, growing rice, vegetables, oranges, tangerines and lichees, and raising chickens, ducks and pigs. The land was not fertile, and the villagers barely had enough food for their families.

Life for the women from poor families was particularly harsh. They had to do all the cooking, mending and washing, raise the children, and work in the fields as well. Giving birth was simply an interruption in a regular day's work for these women. They would run home when labour started if they had the time; otherwise, the delivery would be in the field. The mother often delivered her own baby. If a knife was not at hand, a piece of pottery would be smashed to give a clean sharp edge to cut the baby's umbilical cord. The baby would then be wrapped in a piece of cloth, and the mother would go right back to work.<sup>1</sup> People managed to survive if there were no external calamities.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Chinese population suffered greatly under the ineffective rule of the Ch'ing dynasty and the tyranny of the ruthless warlords. The country was impoverished by the constant bullying of European countries trying to get trade concessions from China. On top of that, there were droughts, floods and famine. Those in Guangdong Province were hardest hit because of a sharp increase in population; there just wasn't enough land to feed the people. Many men

emigrated to work as indentured labourers under contract, commonly known as the “pig trade.” Many went to the East Indies and Malaya; others went to the West Indies and islands in the Indian Ocean; still others went to California. They were packed into crowded and unsanitary boats known as “floating hell.” There were often riots and sometimes the captain and the crew were killed. Many died of hunger or disease during the voyage. The highest death rate recorded for this kind of human cargo was as much as 66 percent.<sup>2</sup> When these men reached their destinations, they worked under harsh and restrictive conditions, living in compounds, and often subjected to corporal punishment.

Chinese emigration was actually illegal, but it had been going on for a long time. This overseas emigration received great impetus from the discovery of gold in California in 1849 and in Australia in 1851.

In 1890, Great-grandfather Lee Leung Yik journeyed from Guangdong Province to San Francisco, despite his age of 49, perhaps with the hope of panning for gold. Life must have been very hard in the village of Hoiping for him to leave at his age. He went with the hope of making enough money to send home to help support his family. San Francisco was known as Gum San, Gold Mountain. If Great-grandfather had tried gold mining, he would not have been successful, because Chinese miners were barred from the rich strikes until white miners had exhausted the find. Most of the original Chinese migrants ended up working as common labourers, ranch hands and cooks or at whatever jobs they could find. Some became disillusioned and returned to China. Great-grandfather worked at the Union Cigar Company at 17 Dupont Street in San Francisco. The company was listed in the 1876 *Chinese Business Directory*.

After having settled in San Francisco, Great-grandfather sent for his younger brother, Man Yik, and for his second son, Ting Sien, my grandfather. Man Yik also brought his eldest son to San Francisco with him.

My grandfather, Lee Ting Sien, later known as Lee Hysan, was born on the twentieth day of the ninth moon in 1880, in the village of Hoiping in Guangdong Province. He was nine or ten when he travelled to San Francisco to join his father. Why Great-grandfather sent for his second son and not his eldest was anybody's guess, but one answer is that the eldest had to stay home to help his mother. Or perhaps Great-grandfather was already able to see the potential in his second son.

The Chinese community in San Francisco in the early days tended to be self-contained, and consisted mainly of men. The Chinese were regarded as a curiosity. They dressed in cotton tops and pants that looked like pajamas. They wore cotton shoes, and braided their hair in long queues. The style had started in the seventeenth century when the Manchus conquered China and Ch'ing took over Ming as the ruling dynasty. The Manchus wanted to degrade the Han Chinese to make them look like horses; therefore, the men were required to wear their hair in long queues to look like horses' tails, and their shoes looked like horses' hooves.

Since most of these Chinese migrants to America planned to return home when they had enough savings put aside, their ties with their families and villages in China were very strong. They depended upon their families and upon district associations for guidance and assistance in the New World. These associations, which have existed in some form almost from the time the first Chinese immigrants reached the shores of California, helped establish Chinese language schools and provided leadership in the long battle against discrimination. Their promotion of traditional Chinese customs, festivals and operas helped to maintain the morale of the early immigrants. Disputes were usually handled either by the district association or the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. The tongs, rather than the police, often provided protection.

The original Chinese migrants to San Francisco were all from Guangdong Province in southern China. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, popularly known as the Chinese Six Companies, was the watchdog that oversaw the affairs of the Chinese community. The first association was established in 1849 and known as the Kwang Chou Association because it included immigrants from six districts of Kwang Chou in Guangdong Province. In 1850, the Sam Yup Association was formed for immigrants from the three districts of Namhoi, Punyu and Shuntak. Before the end of the same year, the Sze Yup Association was formed for immigrants from Yanping, Hoiping, Sunning and Sunwui districts. The fourth and fifth associations were established in 1852, the Young Wo Association for immigrants from the Heungshan area, and the Hip Kat Association for the Hakka compatriots. And in 1854, the sixth organization, the Ning Yung Association was formed.<sup>3</sup> Great-grandfather and his brother belonged to the Sze Yup Association. All Chinese

immigrants came from small villages and they all spoke the same local dialects. Anyone who spoke the same way was regarded as a brother.

During the years when the Lees lived in San Francisco, Ting Sien and his cousin attended the Chinese Primary School at 929 Clay Street.<sup>4</sup> This school, originally known as the Chinese School, had been established in 1859 by the Board of Supervisors to ensure the segregation of Chinese children from white children in San Francisco's public schools. Its name was later changed to the Commodore Stockton School.<sup>5</sup>

The churches provided the first and, for many years, the only English language classes for residents in Chinatown. The English that Grandfather learnt in San Francisco became a great asset to him in later years.

In 1896, after having saved some money working in San Francisco, Great-grandfather, together with his brother and the two boys, returned to China.

Back in Hoiping, Great-grandmother and her family had found life very difficult. However, they noticed that in the nearby area of Sunwui, the land around Gyan Chou Wu (Silver Lake) was regularly flooded by the river. It was not only a bountiful area for hunting, but the land was also very fertile.<sup>6</sup> When Great-grandfather and Ting Sien returned to China, the family moved to Sunwui and lived in the village of Garlieu in Sheungsui County. From then on, Sunwui became our ancestral home.

Great-grandfather was regarded as affluent since he came back from San Francisco (Gum San) with some savings. A sizeable piece of land was purchased for the building of a new home in Garlieu for my Great-grandparents' retirement and a new ancestral hall was built.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the original home was demolished during the Cultural Revolution, and all the bricks were removed and used for building other structures.<sup>8</sup> The present building on the same site is modern, with a fair-sized garden surrounding the house and a number of fruit trees. The house is used by Uncle Lee Pak Chao, a relative, whenever he is in Garlieu.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>2</sup> Yu Sing Mau and Lau Cheun Foon, *Nineteenth Century Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1994), p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas W. Chinn, *Bridging the Pacific* (San Francisco, 1989), pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>5</sup> Chinn, *Bridging the Pacific*, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Lee Pak Chao.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lee Pak Chao.



## CHAPTER 3

### Hong Kong

Great-grandfather Leung Yik was content to return and eventually retire to his village in China, but it was not the kind of life he wanted for his children. On their return from San Francisco with the boys in 1896, my great-grand-uncle, Man Yik, returned to the village of Hoiping and my great-grandfather moved his family to Sunwui. Both brothers then went to Hong Kong to start an import-export company, Lai Cheung Loong, at 202 Queen's Road Central. The brothers commuted frequently between the villages in South China and Hong Kong. In 1897, Great-grandfather enrolled his second son, Ting Sien, my grandfather, at Queen's College in Hong Kong. I presume he recognized that this son was the one who would benefit the most from a good education.

Great-grandfather would have known much about the colony. When he went to San Francisco, he would have boarded a boat in Hong Kong, because that was the main port of transportation for the Chinese abroad. When he sent money home to China, he could only send it via banks in Hong Kong. He would have heard of the great success of a number of enterprising Chinese merchants in Hong Kong since it had become a British colony in 1841. The colonial government recognized the new Chinese merchant class as leaders in their community due to their commercial success and their authority in organizations such as the Tung Wah Hospital, a charitable association that had become the centre of Chinese power in Hong Kong.

Well known for its magnificent harbour, Hong Kong was first mentioned in Chinese historical records in the Ming dynasty. It was the name of a small village on the island's south coast. The island and its surrounding areas were famous for the growing of incense trees, which produced aromatic wood known as Kwun Heung. During the Ming dynasty, incense wood and related products were assembled at Shek Pai Wan (Aberdeen Harbour) before being shipped to Guangzhou and as far north as the provinces of Kiangsu and Chekiang. This area was, therefore,

called Heung Kong, meaning fragrant harbour, and the village was called Heung Kong Tsuen, meaning Fragrant Harbour Village.

During the Ming dynasty (1368-1643), economic conditions improved and the population increased. At the end of the sixteenth century, in the reign of Wan Li, there were at least seven communities on the island, including Heung Kong Tsuen. These were mainly on the south coast as the northern area was more sparsely populated.

Towards the end of the Ming dynasty, the island was frequently attacked by pirates, despite the patrols by naval vessels along the coast. During the early part of the Ch'ing dynasty, in the first year of the Kang Hsi reign in 1661, coastal villages on the island were evacuated and the population moved inland.

Eight years later, the Edict of the Coastal Evacuation was revoked, and people returned to their villages. In the early years of the Yung Cheng reign, the seven villages of Hong Kong, Tai Hang, Chung Hom, Chek Chue, Tai Tam, Shau Kei Wan and Wong Nai Chung were rebuilt. The government constructed forts and set up military posts along the coast to discourage piracy, but none were actually established on the island. During the rule of Chia Ch'ing (1796-1820), two more villages were built as well as the Hung Heung Lo Naval Base, which was controlled by the Tai Pang Battalion.<sup>1</sup> In 1841, the sparsely populated, rocky island was ceded to Britain.

Ever since Hong Kong had been ceded to Britain, it had become a refuge for the Chinese from China, despite rampant discrimination. At first, the outlaws and the desperate came. Then, during the Taiping upheaval (1851-65) in China, Hong Kong came to be regarded as a desirable place to live by "respectable" Chinese. It was a free port, and there was no war. Many Chinese merchants brought their families to live in the British colony.

These were people of substance and enterprise. Businesses flourished. By 1855, the British government no longer had to subsidize Hong Kong. It had become the main trading port for southern China, handling one-quarter of China's imports and one-third of its exports.<sup>2</sup> By 1859, sixty-five Chinese firms were large enough to be registered as hong (companies).



From 1861 onwards, Hong Kong became the economic centre for trade and manufacturing, including sugar refineries, cement factories, weaving and paper-making. With the establishment of banks and insurance companies and the availability of commercial loans, smaller companies were able to compete with the large establishments. Despite the fact that the Chinese were treated as second-class citizens, they were commercially very successful.

The largest and the most powerful hong at the time was Jardine Matheson and Co. Its officers were very influential in the British Parliament and effectively ruled Hong Kong from the governor down. They sat on the Legislative and Executive Councils; they controlled the police, and they were members of the exclusive Hong Kong Club and the Jockey Club.<sup>3</sup>

In 1866, the financial world was rocked by the collapse of the London discount house, Overend and Gurney. On the China coast, Jardine Matheson avoided bankruptcy by negotiating a capital sale and lease-back of their extensive property portfolio, but the formerly very successful Dent and Co. had to shut its doors. Fifteen years later, only Jardine Matheson remained listed among Hong Kong's eighteen largest ratepayers. All the remainder were Chinese.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1880s, the Chinese had become the largest real estate owners in the colony; Chinese investments in land were 7.5 times higher than those of Europeans.<sup>5</sup> Hong Kong was regarded as a land of commercial opportunity for the Chinese, despite the fact that they had no political power, very few legal rights, and often suffered humiliating discrimination.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Hong Kong became home to the Lee family. The island's status as a British colony was the reason for their move because, if the island had remained part of China, conditions there would have been the same as in South China.

By the time my great-grandfather and grandfather moved to the colony, Hong Kong was a city of palaces, more magnificent than the hillside Italian city of Genoa. Above the city of Victoria was a suburb hanging in the clouds of the Peak where only wealthy Europeans were permitted to live, with the subsequent exception of Sir Robert Hotung's

family. A new hospital for Europeans had just opened on the Peak, and an English-language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*, had been recently launched.

In 1904, the first trams were put into service and the horse-drawn carriages that used to fill the streets had vanished. Almost everyone still travelled by rickshaw or sedan chair carried by heaving coolies, as motor cars had not yet reached Hong Kong. Carts were pulled by oxen or water buffalo.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the population of the colony had reached over 325,000, the majority being Chinese. At the turn of the century, water shortages were a perennial problem, and new and bigger reservoirs were being planned. In 1901, the drought was so severe that water had to be shipped from the New Territories to the island.

The port of Hong Kong was expanding, and huge warehouses, known as *godowns*, lined the Kowloon waterfront. The number of ships entering the harbour had increased by 60 percent over the previous ten years. Industries such as sugar refineries, flour mills, cotton mills and cement works had sprung up. Hong Kong was progressing with its land reclamation in Central (the commercial section of the island), and the area was dotted with new four or five-storey buildings. Businesses were controlled by the hong: Jardine Matheson and Butterfield & Swire in shipping, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in banking, and John Swire's Taikoo in sugar refinery.

While the hong were investing their opium fortunes in legitimate businesses, the government derived annual revenue of about \$2 million from the sale of the opium monopoly to the highest bidders, despite the strong opposition to the drug in Britain. Opium smoking was so popular among the Chinese that it was estimated that one in ten men was an opium user. Even though there was a gradual reduction of *divans* (establishments where Chinese men gathered to smoke opium) and no new licences were sold by the Hong Kong government after 1910, the sale of opium remained legal until 1945, and licences continued to be sold to the highest bidder by the Portuguese government in Macao.

The population of Hong Kong lived in two separate communities, the Chinese and the non-Chinese, each having very little to do with the other except at work. The Chinese men wore their hair in queues (pigtails) in Manchu style, and few dressed in Western clothes. Most of them wore

mandarin jackets and pants or long gowns, with soft black shoes. They did not take part in foreign sport, and none went swimming. The vast majority of them had no contact with Europeans at all. The old men spent time taking their caged birds for an airing outdoors, and the youngsters liked to kick a shuttlecock or fly a kite. In the evening, one could hear the clatter of mahjong, the favourite game of the Chinese.

As for Chinese women, with the exception of petty hawkers, sampan women, scavengers and seamstresses, none went out into the streets. Many upper-class women had bound feet and never left their family compounds. The poorer classes wore cotton clothes like pajamas, while the upper-class ladies wore beautifully embroidered silk pants, skirts and mandarin jackets.

Despite the description of Hong Kong as a city of palaces, for the Chinese population, it was a very unhygienic place in which to live. Plague was endemic and malaria was widespread. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was discovered that officers of the sanitary teams charged with rat-proofing houses and spraying mosquito breeding grounds made small fortunes by evading the law, in collusion with property owners and building contractors.

Sanitary problems magnified racial prejudice, and demands were made for separate residential areas to be set aside for Westerners and Chinese. Following the creation of the Peak reservation for the Europeans, an ordinance in 1902 set aside another area in Kowloon for them, since the government believed the Chinese could not be trusted to keep the mosquito population down. However, exceptions were made by Foreign Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, who, on approval of a separate area for "people of clean habits," added that Chinese of good standing should be permitted residence there.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Siu Kwok-kin, "The History of Hong Kong: From a Village to a City," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (1989): 391.

<sup>2</sup> Mau and Foon, *Nineteenth Century Hong Kong*, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong* (London, 1993), p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> Mau and Foon, *Nineteenth Century Hong Kong*, p. 336.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Opium Question

The circumstances under which Britain took control of Hong Kong and its excellent harbour are complex and lie in the escalating disputes over trade restrictions that had been imposed on foreign merchants by the Chinese government since the seventeenth century. By the early nineteenth century, tensions centred on control over the illegal import of opium by British traders, which had become increasingly devastating to the Chinese economy and its people.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, goods such as tea, china and silk were very much in demand by the West, and trade between China and Britain, France, Holland, Portugal and the United States increased. Trade was, however, greatly limited by the restrictions imposed by the Imperial Chinese government. The government maintained that the Celestial Kingdom produced everything the country needed and, therefore, had no need for manufactured goods from “foreign devils.” Foreign merchants were required to pay for all the goods in silver.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Britain was the leading country that traded with China, mainly because of the popularity of tea in England. In 1664, slightly more than two pounds of tea was imported into England, but by 1783, the legally imported amount was 2,600 tons. Probably three times that amount was smuggled in to avoid high duties.<sup>1</sup>

Trade was limited to Guangzhou (Canton), which acted as an outlet for Chinese goods; the other ports were closed to foreigners. In addition to tea, silks, cottons, porcelain, paper, medical products and spices were also in demand, and payments were strictly in silver. Because of the winds, the trading season was limited to May through November. During those months, foreigners were allowed to reside, not in the city of Guangzhou, but in their “factories” outside the city. They kept their permanent establishments down river at Portuguese Macao.<sup>2</sup> They were not allowed to learn Chinese, employ servants, use sedan chairs, possess

firearms, or have their wives with them. However, these restrictions were not always enforced.

Trade with foreigners was strictly regulated under the authority of the *hoppo*, the superintendent of the South Sea Customs. The *hoppo* held a medium rank far below that of the viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi, or even that of the governor of the city of Guangzhou. These latter gentlemen were scholar-administrators who received modest salaries, and whose lifestyle depended on “gifts” from the *hoppo*. In theory, Chinese customs duties were clearly specified; in practice, as much as possible was collected, and as little as prudent was remitted to Beijing.

Under the *hoppo* was the merchants’ guild, or *cohong*, which, in turn, was “squeezed” by the *hoppo*. Foreigners were allowed to deal only with the *cohong* merchants who took every opportunity to secure large profits from the foreign merchants. This severely limited the latter’s ability to bargain and get the best prices for their purchases.

Officials from the various embassies were sent to Peking to try to negotiate better relations between their merchants and the Chinese authorities. These attempts failed because the Imperial Court refused to recognize that any other country could be regarded as the equal of China. Despite the restrictions, however, trade between China and the West increased. Western governments became concerned about the drain of silver from their countries. The merchants were eager to find some other commodity that the Chinese would buy from them. They found opium.

Opium was first grown in China for medicinal uses. In the seventeenth century, the habit of smoking it had gradually spread. To control opium addiction, a government monopoly had been established in 1729, and high taxes restricted the drug to a privileged few.<sup>3</sup> In 1800, the import of opium was forbidden. However, British merchants saw a huge potential market among the poorer people of China for cheap Indian opium. Western traders in Canton and Macao smuggled in massive quantities of Indian opium with the cooperation of Chinese merchants and officials who received “gifts” as payment. This trade caused a huge increase in addiction, including the eunuchs in the imperial household. Millions of pounds of opium were imported or smuggled into the country. All the tea in China could not pay for it, and Chinese silver reserves evaporated. The Chinese government passed edicts forbidding the smoking of opium, but these proved to be useless.



As Britain was approaching the zenith of its power in the middle of the nineteenth century, China had sunk to its lowest point since the Manchu took control in 1644. Corruption was endemic. The struggle over the opium trade represented China's fight for sovereignty, even though corrupt Chinese and Manchu officials participated in the trade. Westerners provoked the Chinese at every turn, and when the Chinese struck back, the foreign merchants demanded concessions from local mandarins. If concessions were not forthcoming, gunboats were called in. No foreigner seriously believed that the Manchu had the strength of character to take drastic action.

By 1835, the amount of opium imported into China had risen to over 30,000 chests. The increase was alarming. Since all opium was imported illegally, no duties were paid, except for exactions going to the middlemen and the mandarins' private accounts. And since all illegal imports had to be paid for in bullion, the strain on China's reserves was great. In 1836 the Peking government debated whether to suppress or to legalize the trade. The Canton merchants were unanimous in asking that the trade be legalized. It was reported that the empress supported it. Senior Judge Hsu Nai-tsi also wrote a paper on this subject which was translated and published in the *Canton Register* of July 12, 1836.<sup>4</sup>

Both Europeans and Chinese in Guangzhou took legalization for granted. James Matheson of the British merchant company Jardine Matheson and Co. disagreed, however. He wrote on July 12: "I do not think well of the plan as far as our interests are concerned – tho' it has already enhanced prices."<sup>5</sup> Six months later, nothing had happened. It soon became clear in Guangzhou that, far from legalizing the drug, Emperor Tao Kuang had made his decision that the drug be outlawed, and the only question was how best to put an end to the trade.

In the early 1800s, there were two main British firms trading in China: Dent and Co. and Magniac and Co. The latter became Jardine Matheson and Co., the partners being Dr. William Jardine and James Matheson. These British firms were colloquially known as hongcs, and their partners as taipans. Jardine Matheson was Ewo Hong, and Dent was known as Pao-shun Hong.

James Matheson and William Jardine went to England in 1836 to encourage the British government to take a stronger approach towards China. They suggested that, if the Chinese refused the demands of the

merchants, then England should consider taking over a territory in China, such as Chousan, an island off central China. Hong Kong was far from people's minds at the time.

In his book, *The Present Position and Prospects of the British Trade with China*, Matheson described the Chinese as a people characterized by a marvellous degree of imbecility, avarice, conceit and obstinacy, who subjected innocent foreigners to injuries and insults of horrible description. He insisted that Britain must vindicate its insulted honour as a nation and protect the interests of its commerce.<sup>6</sup>

Charles Elliot, who was the superintendent at the time, complained to the foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, that the British merchants' behaviour was the chief cause of offence, since they treated the Chinese insultingly. Unfortunately, Elliot was not empowered to remove or punish anyone. For its part, the East India Company maintained that the Chinese were a great, powerful and peculiar people who would never be bound by any treaty, and in the absence of any treaty, the law of nations prohibited any attempt to enforce British claims upon them.<sup>7</sup>

The American traders saw the writing on the wall. Russell's, the largest American trading house, decided to discontinue all connection with the opium trade in China, a business that was fast becoming too dangerous and disreputable.<sup>8</sup>

The British traders, with more at stake, expected that, if worst came to worst, the Royal Navy would bail them out. However, as a precaution, Jardine Matheson suggested that deliveries of opium and piece goods should be diverted to Hong Kong and up the coast. This indicated that some trade was already taking place in the island's waters.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1839, Lin Tse-hsu, governor of Kiangsu, was appointed imperial commissioner with full powers to deal with the opium question in Guangzhou. As viceroy of Hupeh and Hunan Provinces, Lin had ordered that any smoker who refused the cure would have part of his upper lip cut off, to prevent him from using a pipe.

Lin made it clear that his targets were the Chinese collaborators. As long as the foreigners obeyed the law and refrained from smuggling, they would be treated benevolently. He knew that legitimate trade was important and must be protected. On March 18, he proclaimed that all opium stocks must be surrendered and that foreigners must pledge never again to deal in the drug. If these conditions were not met, the *Cohong*

merchants would suffer imprisonment, expropriation and decapitation. The foreigners would suffer severe punishment prescribed by the new law. Three days were given for compliance, and in the meantime, the foreigners were to be confined to their factories.<sup>10</sup>

On March 21, at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, the foreign merchants agreed to surrender just over a thousand chests, a very small quantity. Lin was furious at what he recognized as blatant procrastination. Since William Jardine was still in England, Lin ordered the arrest of Lancelot Dent of Dent and Co., who was identified as chief of the foreign smugglers.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, Dent was more popular than Jardine with the Chinese. Captain Elliot tried to smuggle Dent out of the country, but the Chinese blocked their escape by constructing barriers across the river. Dent was subsequently freed. He later bought a house in Manila to use as a possible alternative centre for his opium distribution.

Captain Elliot, on behalf of the British government, instructed the merchants to surrender the drug, which in essence meant that the British government was obliged to compensate them. The government had no intention of paying unless it could cajole or coerce the Chinese into reimbursing it. More than 2.6 million pounds of opium was delivered and burned at a specially constructed site by the banks of the Pearl River.<sup>12</sup>

Jardine Matheson agreed not to import any more opium. James Matheson knew that he could argue later that this agreement had been made under duress and was, therefore, not binding. He wrote to his suppliers and told them to send their opium to Macao, to Alexander Matheson who would be happy to continue to dispose of it.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston asked for the advice of the London East India and China Association, which they gave in a long letter of November 2, 1839. The association was ready to accept that British subjects in China would be subject to Chinese laws, including the ban on importing opium. "We are quite prepared to admit, should the Chinese persist in prohibiting the import of opium, that henceforth the British merchants trading to China must obey the laws of that country in respect to that article, and that the Crown of Great Britain cannot be called upon to interfere in any manner in support of its subjects who violate them." They also considered that it was essential that British representatives be allowed direct access to the Chinese authorities, upon equal terms (with



proper diplomatic relations, foreigners treated as trading partners and not as barbarians and kept in their “factories”), and they specified ports in addition to Guangzhou that should be opened for trade. If this was not allowed, then they recommended “the cession, by purchase or otherwise, of an island be obtained.” Lord Palmerston adopted the suggestions in their entirety.<sup>14</sup>

The memorandum was followed by a delegation from the association led by John Abel Smith, Whig M.P. and banker for Jardine Matheson; William Jardine, who was shortly to become Whig member for Ashburton; and Alexander Matheson. The deputation could not persuade Palmerston to yield an inch on the question of the government’s paying, then and there, for the surrendered opium. They did, however, succeed in getting Palmerston to accept that the Chinese could be forced, without too much difficulty, to pay up instead. The delegation provided practical advice on how this should be done. Palmerston had little difficulty in convincing the rest of the cabinet of the need to dispatch an expedition to China.<sup>15</sup>

Commissioner Lin ordered all foreign traders to sign personal bonds of life and death before their ships were allowed back to Whampoa (about seven miles below Guangzhou, which was the furthest inland that ocean-going ships could go up the Pearl River because of the sandbar). Danish, German, American and Spanish captains signed Commissioner Lin’s pledge and entered Whampoa to trade freely in other goods, but Captain Elliot, in a rage, tore the document to shreds. Henceforth, he announced, all British vessels would discharge their cargoes at Macao.<sup>16</sup> When Commissioner Lin prohibited commerce by the British at Macao, the English merchants traded directly with Chinese smugglers offshore.

In 1839, tensions over control of the opium smuggling culminated in warfare between China and Britain. The initial incident that sparked hostilities was the killing of a Chinese civilian and injuring of others by a drunken party of British sailors in Kowloon in July 1839.<sup>17</sup> Chinese authorities, under Commissioner Lin, demanded that the perpetrators be turned over, but Captain Elliot refused. In the face of British intransigence, Commissioner Lin forced all British residents out of Macao. They boarded sixty or so merchant ships, sailed for Hong Kong, and anchored there. While the Chinese authorities expected the British to accept the ban on opium and return to Guangzhou, Captain Elliot defied

the ultimatum. When negotiations completely broke down on November 3, 1839, the British opened fire and sank four Chinese war-junks. The war was on.<sup>18</sup>

Commissioner Lin banned the British from Guangzhou completely, with the result that the Americans, who had remained in the factories, simply took over the trade on behalf of the British. Legitimate British imports went through as usual. Opium continued to be sold through ports up the coast. It was sent to Manila to be transhipped to the east coast of China. Jardine Matheson rapidly recovered the profits the company had lost through the confiscation of the drug.<sup>19</sup> Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston wrote to Captain Elliot that a naval force and a small army detachment would arrive at the end of March the following year. This force was to be under the command of Elliot's cousin, Admiral George Elliot.

Unfortunately, China misunderstood the special relationship that existed between private British traders and the government in London. Beijing also underestimated the military power of Britain. The British Foreign Office had another motive for war: it wanted to force direct relations with the court in Beijing, which the Manchu had consistently refused.<sup>20</sup>

To China's surprise, the British did not pursue the attack on Guangzhou, but sailed up the coast to capture Tinghai at the mouth of the Yangtze River, where the defenders were unprepared. About ten thousand seasoned British troops were deployed against Chinese forces that had no experience fighting anyone but themselves, and had no acquaintance with modern cannons. Additional battles followed at Guangzhou, Ningpo and other ports, until Beijing gave in.<sup>21</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Sterling Seagrave, *Dragon Lady* (New York, 1992), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, p. 46.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Cession of Hong Kong

On February 20, 1840, Palmerston wrote a letter to the minister of the Emperor of China instructing him: "The British Government demands that one or more sufficiently large properly situated Islands on the coast of China, to be fixed by the British plenipotentiaries [Admiral George Elliot and Captain Charles Elliot], shall be permanently given up to the British Government." When the admiral returned home, the choice was left entirely to Captain Elliot. The British government had been expecting to get the island of Chousan off the northern coast of China or the port of Ningpo, but this was not acceptable to the Chinese. Other islands had been suggested, but Hong Kong, an island with a few fishing villages, was never mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

However, on January 15, 1841, Ch'i-shan, negotiator for the Ch'ing government, wrote to Captain Charles Elliot offering him either Hong Kong or Kowloon, but not both. Elliot replied, accepting Hong Kong on January 16. As a career naval officer, he preferred Hong Kong because of its magnificent harbour (known at that time as Lei Yue Mun). The island also had an abundance of fresh water. With a few guns mounted, men to work them, and a warship, the island could afford protection to merchant shipping.

On January 28, 1841, at the Convention of Ch'uan-pi, Britain, represented by Captain Elliot, demanded the cession of Hong Kong to the British crown, but with a provision that duties should continue to be paid to the Chinese authorities. Arrangements were also made for the payment of a six million-dollar indemnity (in Spanish silver dollars) in six equal installments, direct diplomatic relations on a basis of equality, and the opening of the port of Guangzhou.<sup>2</sup>

Even before that date, the British lost no time in making sure of the cession of Hong Kong. At 8:00 AM on Tuesday, January 26, 1841, the marines from the British naval force, commanded by Commodore Sir Gordon Bremer, landed on Possession Point at the foot of Taipingshan.<sup>3</sup>

At 8:15, the Union Jack was hoisted in Pohingfong and the Queen's health was drunk with three cheers.

Two groups with the most immediate interest in the acquisition of Hong Kong were the merchants and the missionaries.<sup>4</sup> They understood the advantages that a piece of British territory in South China would afford them. Many merchants were present at the hoisting of the flag, including at least four Indian merchants. James Matheson of Jardine Matheson came from Macao to witness the event and, afterwards, he circumnavigated the island. On February 8, eight Protestant missionaries chartered a *lorcha* in Macao and went to Hong Kong on an exploratory outing. Their verdict was that "Hong Kong will, if retained by the British, rise in importance and influence until it becomes the first insular emporium in these Eastern waters."<sup>5</sup>

In a letter to her Uncle Leopold, king of the Belgians, Queen Victoria wrote, "Albert is so much amused at my having got the island of Hong Kong, and we think Victoria ought to be called Princess of Hong Kong in addition to Princess Royal."<sup>6</sup>

Captain Elliot, from on board H.M.S. *Wellesley*, proclaimed that Hong Kong was now part of Her Majesty's dominions, and that for the time being he himself would govern the island.<sup>7</sup> On February 1, the cession of the island of Hong Kong to the British Crown was proclaimed to the Chinese inhabitants. However, neither the British government nor the Chinese were pleased with the cession of Hong Kong, and hostilities continued.

In negotiating for Hong Kong, Charles Elliot had disregarded instructions sent to him from the British government, and he was dismissed by Lord Palmerston on April 21, 1841. In his letter to Elliot, Lord Palmerston wrote, "You have obtained the Cession of Hong Kong, a barren island with hardly a house on it.... Now it seems obvious that Hong Kong will not be a Mart of Trade...our Commercial Transactions will be carried on as heretofore at Canton; but they [the British residents] will be able to go and build Houses to retire to, in the desert island of Hong Kong."<sup>8</sup>

The arrangements at Ch'uan-pi were repudiated by the Chinese government as well. Ch'i-shan was packed off in chains to Beijing and was replaced by Yang Fang.<sup>9</sup> On May 21, 1841, Chinese reinforcements were sent to recover Hong Kong. Fireships descended on the moored



warships and guns from concealed batteries opened fire. However, H.M.S. *Nemesis*, with her mobility and firepower, saved the situation for the British. A swift advance on Guangzhou was ordered.<sup>10</sup>

Hostilities continued until July 1842. On August 29, 1842, the Treaty of Nanking was signed under duress aboard the H.M.S. *Cornwallis*. This was a turning point in the history of China. Five treaty ports were opened to foreign trade – Guangzhou (Canton), Shanghai, Amoy, Foochow and Ningpo; six million Spanish silver dollars were paid in indemnity for opium destroyed by Commissioner Lin, three million were paid for debts owed to British traders by Chinese merchants, twelve million were paid as indemnity to Britain for the cost of the war; and the island of Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. However, it was not until January 4, 1843, that the British government decided to keep Hong Kong, when Lord Aberdeen (who had replaced Palmerston as foreign secretary) asked Sir Henry Pottinger to assume the government of Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> On June 26, 1843, when the Treaty of Nanking was ratified, the emperor of China finally recognized Hong Kong as a British colony.

Hong Kong in its early days was a disappointment. According to the census taken on May 15, 1841, there were sixteen villages on the island with a population of 7,450.<sup>12</sup> A deputation informed the colonial secretary on August 29, 1845 that “Hong Kong has no trade at all and is the mere place of residence of the Government and its officers with a few British merchants and a very scanty poor population.”<sup>13</sup>

On March 8, 1851, the *Economist* described Hong Kong as a hilly, stony island with an excellent harbour. The only successful merchant houses were Jardine Matheson and Dent, which were pursuing their customary trade. However, the article suggested that Hong Kong could become a useful settlement. It was, at any rate, a refuge for the China trade.<sup>14</sup>

The proximity of Hong Kong to the mainland worried British naval and military men from the earliest days. Forts on Kowloon held the island within easy cannon shot. Although most of the peninsula was occupied by insignificant hamlets tenanted by stonecutters and lime burners, Kowloon City, at the northeastern corner of the Kowloon peninsula, had been fortified in 1668 when a signal station was established.<sup>15</sup>

The Chinese were well aware of Kowloon’s strategic position. In

1843, after the ratification of the Treaty of Nanking, the Imperial Chinese government transferred the assistant magistrate of Hsin-an County to Kowloon, with administrative responsibility for 491 villages. Also transferred there was the Commodore of Ta-p'eng, the chief military officer of the county. The garrison was increased to 150.<sup>16</sup> In 1846, the governor general of Guangdong and Guangxi recommended that a walled city be constructed in Kowloon and equipped with cannon to strengthen coastal defence and restrain the 'barbarian' base in Hong Kong. The walled city was completed in 1847.<sup>17</sup>

The Chinese officials in Kowloon and the British officials in Hong Kong kept in close touch, and generally cooperated in maintaining law and order in the vicinity. At the Convention of Peking in October 1860, Kowloon Peninsula was ceded to Britain. However, the Kowloon Walled City remained part of China. Chinese officials there remained actively involved with the community on both sides of the border,<sup>18</sup> and at times the Chinese in Hong Kong looked to Kowloon City for protection.<sup>19</sup>

On July 1, 1898, the New Territory (as the New Territories were then called), the area south of the Shenzhen River, was leased to Britain for ninety-nine years. The population in this area was tradition-bound and indignant that their homeland had been transferred to the British without their having been consulted.<sup>20</sup> In 1899, Chinese officials left the Walled City in Kowloon.<sup>21</sup> The British colony then consisted of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula, the New Territories and 235 adjacent islands.<sup>22</sup> In 1889, Rudyard Kipling had asked in Hong Kong, "How is it that everybody here smells of money?" and been told, "It is because the island is going ahead mightily. Because everything pays." That summarized Hong Kong as it was then and remains today.<sup>23</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> K.J.P. Lowe, "Hong Kong, 26 January 1984: Hoisting the Flag, Revisited," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (1989): 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Lowe, "Hong Kong, 26 January 1984: Hoisting the Flag, Revisited," p. 393.

<sup>13</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 167.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Sinn, "Kowloon Walled City: Its Origin and Early History," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27 (1987): 30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, in 1886, when it was rumoured that five hundred children would be sacrificed to consecrate the Tai Tam Water Works, children were sent to Kowloon City for protection, to the extent that hardly any children were to be seen in Hong Kong for two days. Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> The day before the hoisting of the flag, the police and the guard of honour discovered a trench on the side of the hill, about eight hundred yards from the spot where the flagstaff was to be erected. It was filled with antique weapons to ambush the officials and the ladies who were to be present at the ceremony. Soldiers were sent to chase the peasants over the hills. They managed to capture enough ancient weapons to fill an armoury. As a result, the picnic arrangements at the hoisting of the flag were cancelled. Nigel Cameron, *Power* (Hong Kong, 1982), pp. 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> Sinn, "Kowloon Walled City: Its Origin and Early History," p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Lowe, "Hong Kong, 26 January 1984: Hoisting the Flag, Revisited," p. 391.

<sup>23</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 279.



## CHAPTER 6

### The Pupil Teacher

**A**fter Hong Kong was ceded to Britain, schools were established by the Morrison Education Society, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the London Missionary Society. The main objective of these mission schools was to train candidates for the ministry; therefore, they had little success among the Chinese population. The middle-class Chinese who could afford to pay for schooling had little interest in Western education.<sup>1</sup>

In 1858, Reverend (later Dr.) James Legge, senior missionary of the London Missionary Society, translator of the Chinese classics and the first professor of Chinese at Oxford University, went to Guangzhou (Canton) to visit the examination hall, where scholars were incarcerated in cells for the provincial examination. He was immensely impressed. He believed that there was no other country in the world in which scholastic excellence was as highly revered as in China.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1850s, there was a decline in the number of mission schools, despite the increase in population in Hong Kong. There was not only mistrust between the Chinese and the British citizens in Hong Kong, but also a great deal of animosity brought about by the Anglo-Chinese Wars. Dr. Legge believed that the state schools should be secular and provide what was acceptable to the Chinese in order to attract them to a Western education and, in time, to win their cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

It was against this background of hostility and the failure of the mission schools that the Central School was founded in 1861 by Dr. Legge. It was a “grand central school” which consolidated all city schools. He realized that the Chinese merchants who brought their families to live in Hong Kong in the 1850s would soon become aware of the commercial advantages of learning English. Dr. Frederick Stewart was nominated by Dr. Legge as its first headmaster. The school combined liberal views with a knowledge of China and sympathy for Chinese aspirations. Aware of the great heritage of Chinese culture, and wishing to bridge the gap

between East and West, the Central School was first intended to admit only Chinese students, and English was not compulsory. The school took pride in the many times that the headmaster received the special messenger from the Imperial court in Peking, announcing the high marks attained by some former Central School student in the Imperial Civil Service Examinations.<sup>4</sup> By 1869, a generation of Hong Kong Chinese, who were not only fluent in English but also experienced in Western methods of business and politics, had emerged.

The school attracted boys from many different races and religions. The diversity was obvious when Chinese boys wearing long gowns and queues, Indian boys wearing turbans, and European boys in jackets and ties were all studying and working together. By the 1880s, boys from twelve different nationalities were enrolled, and the students came to understand each other's point of view and outlook in life.<sup>5</sup>

The name of the Central School was changed to Victoria College in 1881 and to Queen's College in 1894. The school took great pride in the fact that Sun Yat-sen, the father of the Republic of China, was one of its students. He enrolled as student number 2746, on April 15, 1884, under his student name of Sun Tai Tseung.<sup>6</sup> Queen's College came to be regarded as the Harrow or Eton of the colonies, and the school was held in honour the world over; many of its boys became prominent citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Realizing the opportunities for his family in Hong Kong, Great-grandfather enrolled his second son in Queen's College. At the beginning of 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, a large number of boys were admitted into Queen's College, and Grandfather Ting Sien was student number 6707.<sup>8</sup>

From being a student, Grandfather became a pupil teacher. Chinese teachers in those days did not have the benefit of attending a university or a teacher's college. They all apprenticed as pupil teachers on probation. Early every morning for two hours, these pupil teachers were taught English and methods of teaching known as pedagogy. For the rest of the day, they taught the younger students in classes of about sixty students each. The curriculum consisted of the three Rs in Chinese and English and the Scriptures – not as a religion but for translation purposes, and only with the parents' permission.

The pupil teachers sometimes found themselves teaching in the assembly hall, concurrently with two other classes, without screens

separating them and without platforms on which to stand. It must have been nerve-wracking to cope with sixty students under these circumstances. Their evenings were spent studying. Because there was no boarding and they received a monthly allowance of only ten to fifteen dollars, the pupil teachers could not afford to take a tram or sedan-chair. They had to walk to school every day. When Grandfather attended Queen's College, he lived above Lai Cheung Loong, the company started by Great-grandfather and his brother Man Yik, on Queen's Road Central. The walk to school was not too far.<sup>9</sup> Some pupil teachers went on to become Chinese masters at Queen's College, some later held important posts in China, and some became leading citizens of Hong Kong, as in the case of Grandfather.<sup>10</sup>

In 1898, Grandfather had attained the marriageable age of eighteen. Following Chinese custom, Great-grandparents contacted the village matchmaker to proceed with the arrangements. The matchmaker would bring together families that were equal in status and wealth. As the saying goes, bamboo door matches bamboo door, wooden door matches wooden door. The horoscopes of the young man and his prospective bride would then be read to make sure they were compatible. Thus, Grandfather's marriage to Wong Lan Fong from the village of Toisan was arranged. The ceremony was held in Sunwui at the village of Garlicu. Grandfather was still attending Queen's College at the time.

On Prize Giving Day 1900, Grandfather was among the recipients of special awards.<sup>11</sup> The next year, he left Queen's College to join the workforce. However, he continued over the years to be very much involved with his old school. In 1910, together with two other old boys, he gave generously to the Queen's College St. John Ambulance Brigade. In the same year, he also founded the Lee Hysan and Grant Scholarships.<sup>12</sup> *Hysan* was a name Grandfather adopted when he left Queen's College and went out to work; *Grant* was a friend of his at Queen's College.

In 1920, the Amateur Dramatic Association of Queen's College was revived, and several performances of *Romeo and Juliet* were mounted, with the proceeds going to the college famine and war distress funds. Grandfather gave medals to the boys who sold the most tickets. He also financed the school band to play at the Hong Kong Schools Sports Day. Because of his generous contributions, his portrait was hung for the year with that of Bertram Tanner, the headmaster at Queen's College.<sup>13</sup> In 1925, in memory of his friend Kong Ki Fai, Grandfather agreed to the provision

of a further scholarship at Queen's College.<sup>14</sup>

The Queen's College Old Boys' Association was formed in December 1920 to help the school, and to provide a link between past and present scholars. Grandfather became president of the association in 1928. Every year at the Old Boys' Dinner, he supplied the champagne, generally known as "Lee Hysan Joy Juice."<sup>15</sup> Consequently, he was 'commemorated' at the second reunion dinner in a rhyme composed by the editor of the college magazine, *The Yellow Dragon*:

The mainspring of the OBA since ever it began,  
Deserves the thanks of all Old Boys, so drain your glasses dry  
And drink success to Anderson and his 'Anti Mui-Tsai.'  
Our Treasurer, Barretto, is a good and honest man.  
Tomorrow morning when you have fat heads blame Lee Hysan...<sup>16</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gwenneth and John Stokes, *Queen's College, Its History, 1862-1987* (Hong Kong, 1987), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Foreword.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> For the holidays, Grandfather went back to China to his family in Garlieu. During Great-grandfather's visits to Hong Kong, he also stayed at Lai Cheung Loong.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 479.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

## CHAPTER 7

### Lee Hysan

According to Chinese custom, a man often has two names in his lifetime. He is given a name at birth by his parents, and he gives himself another one when he goes to work or when he gets married. When Grandfather started his business career, he gave himself the name Hysan. The name Ting Sien was not used again except by his parents and in the ancestral records. The word *Hy* means hope and *San* means prudence, meaning he hoped to conduct his life with prudence.

Grandfather was a tall, robust and distinguished-looking man with a classic Chinese face, dark skin, slanted eyes and high cheekbones. Although he was well versed in Western ways of thinking and doing business, and was fluent in English, he always dressed in Chinese attire and always followed Chinese customs. He was intelligent, hard-working, enterprising, and well-liked by his peers. He was also a man of great generosity.

His first job in 1901 was with a firm in Bonham Strand called Sui Wing Cheung, which imported Chinese medicines and dried foods from China, and then exported them to Southeast Asia. The proprietor was Chan Niem Deem. Grandfather's talents made him so successful that he was promoted to the position of manager when he was only twenty-one years old.

Grandfather's next position was with Seung Duk Fung, a shipping firm owned by the Singapore Chinese Trading Company. Business was conducted between Malaya and Hong Kong, and he made many trips on their vessels. Since he was always looking for business opportunities, he subsequently went into the shipping business for himself, buying Nam Hung Shipping Company, whose cargo ships plied the seas between Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Rangoon. Within a few years, he became very well known and respected by the merchants of Nam Pak Hong (North South Business Association), who conducted import and export business between China and Southeast Asia.



Grandfather benefited from the entrepreneurial spirit and hard work of the Chinese merchants who had come before him. With the establishment of the different community and business associations from the 1850s onwards, especially the Nam Pak Hong, the Chinese were able to help each other, both in business and in providing security for the Chinese community in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese in Hong Kong had been completely segregated from the Europeans. In 1864, a policy was established that no Chinese, no sedan chairs and no unleashed dogs were allowed in the park. No Chinese were allowed into the library or the City Hall museum at the same time as Europeans.<sup>2</sup> The police existed for the security of the Europeans and their businesses only. The Chinese, therefore, had to form their own associations to protect their homes and businesses by hiring security guards, and the wealthier members donated money to buy fire engines, for fires were frequent occurrences.<sup>3</sup>

When J. Pope Hennessy became governor in 1877, conditions for the Chinese improved because he realized that the prosperity of Hong Kong depended on the Chinese population.<sup>4</sup> By the 1880s, Chinese merchants had become an important component in the economy of Hong Kong. Not only were they the largest landowners, they also paid 90 percent of the taxes in the colony.<sup>5</sup> They had become major competitors of the European companies.

Land in the central part of the island had been reserved for the Europeans until Hennessy became governor. So when Great-grandfather Leung Yik and Great-grand-uncle Man Yik returned from San Francisco with the boys in 1896, as mentioned earlier, they went to Hong Kong and were able to purchase land to start the company Lai Cheung Loong at 202 Queen's Road Central. The company imported blue cotton from Shanghai to sell to the Chinese in Hong Kong, blue cotton being very popular for everyday clothing for the working class at the time.

When Grandfather Hysan went into business for himself, he took over Lai Cheung Loong by injecting more capital and by buying the property.<sup>6</sup> The second floor of the building became his office. Family members who were visiting Hong Kong, such as Great-grandfather, would stay in the upstairs quarters on the third floor. Grandfather's younger cousin, Lee Sui Yuen, also lived there when he was attending Queen's College.<sup>7</sup> The

company continued in business until just before the end of the Second World War, and the property remained in the Lee family until 1992.

As a habit, on weekday mornings, Grandfather usually visited his friends at the various banks such as the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. An old Queen's College friend, Ho Wing Cheun, was the comprador of the Banque de l'Indochine, and another old school friend, Yiu Gueh Yin, was at Citibank, at the corner of Ice House Street. These banks financed Grandfather's various business ventures. Even though he was fluent in English and could have dealt directly with the European managers, he preferred to give the business to his friends.

Later in the morning, Grandfather would drop into Lai Cheung Loong to check his mail and to look after business at the office. Between 12:30 PM and 1:00 PM, he would have lunch at the Yue Kee Chinese Club, at 196-198 Wellington Street, where he would discuss business with his friends. Afterwards, he would drop into the stock exchange to keep an eye on his many investments. The brokerage house he usually dealt with was Benjamin & Potts. He would discuss the stock market with brokers, such as Sze Yee Man and Go Bo Sung. In the evening, he would often go back to the Yue Kee Club for dinner, since this was the place where much business was conducted. He never had dinner at home during the week. He would return home around 10:00 PM.<sup>8</sup>

Grandfather invested heavily in many public companies, including China Light and Power Company, China Sugar Refinery, the Dairy Farm Ice and Cold Storage Company, Hong Kong Electric Company, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Hong Kong Tramways Ltd., China Provident Loan and Mortgage Company, and Green Island Cement Company.<sup>9</sup> He also accumulated land for development which will be dealt with in a separate chapter. His downfall turned out to be his investment in the opium business.

Opium trade was legalized in Hong Kong in 1858. Every year, the *Government Gazette* called for tenders "for the privilege of preparing and selling opium within the colony pursuant to the 1858 Ordinance."<sup>10</sup> In April 1912, the Yue Hing Company was incorporated by the Ma family (from the same Sze Yup District in South China as the Lees), for the purpose of investment in the opium market. It had a capital of \$200,000, made up of two thousand shares of \$100 each. The major shareholders

were Ma Chi Loong and Ma Jui Chiu. Grandfather was one of the minor shareholders. In March 1914, a petition was presented to the court on behalf of one of the shareholders, apparently dissatisfied with the way things were being run, asking for the company to be wound up. The official receiver was appointed provisional liquidator, but the winding-up petition was vigorously contested by other shareholders. The petition was heard by Chief Justice Sir William Rees Davies. The judgement was eventually given in favour of the company.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to his business interests, Grandfather also accepted several civic appointments. In 1913, he was elected as a director of the board of the Tung Wah Hospital; the board members were considered the élite of the Chinese community in Hong Kong.

The Tung Wah Hospital was opened in 1872 with the assistance of the government and the wealthy Chinese in the community and overseas. It was solely for destitute and dying Chinese. In 1894, when many Chinese had died of the plague, the Hong Kong government blamed the Tung Wah Hospital Board for mismanagement. Thereafter, doctors trained in Western medicine joined the Chinese herbalists on the staff at the hospital. The government took control of the hospital in 1903, providing it with an annual grant of \$6,000.<sup>12</sup> A committee of Chinese directors was elected annually to manage the hospital. Each director represented a different trade. The Tung Wah Committee became the focus of Chinese power in the colony, intimately linked with the neighbourhood *kaifongs* and the merchant guilds. The board looked after not only medical but also social issues. For the first time, the colonial authorities had a reliable means of canvassing collective Chinese opinion.<sup>13</sup>

In 1923, Grandfather became one of the four members of the consulting committee of the China Light and Power Company, succeeding Dr. J.W. Noble.<sup>14</sup> Grandfather became a major shareholder in the company and, by 1928, he owned 43,416 shares.<sup>15</sup> China Light and Power was, and still is, one of the most important utilities companies today.

Historically, the company was started as Canton Electric and Fire Extinguishing Company in 1898 by Fung Wa-cheun, the comprador of Shewan, Tomes & Company, and a few of his friends, having gained the concession from the viceroy of Guangdong Province for lighting Guangzhou and the surrounding area. The company ran into financial



difficulties and approached Shewan, Tomes for help; this resulted in the registration in 1900 of China Light and Power Syndicate by Robert G. Shewan, with a capital of \$200,000, divided into two hundred shares of \$1,000 each.<sup>16</sup> In January 1901, the consulting committee, which was set up to guide the syndicate, decided that the available capital was insufficient and that a company should be formed to take over the business. On January 25, 1901, the China Light and Power Company was incorporated. The company's Guangzhou plans proved abortive and, in 1909, that operation was sold to a Chinese company.<sup>17</sup>

Besides business, Grandfather was also keenly interested in the young people of Hong Kong. He was responsible for persuading the government to grant a large piece of land at the base of Caroline Hill to be used by the public for athletics. He became the first president of the South China Athletic Association.

On June 6, 1925, the foundation stone of St. Paul's Girls' College was laid by Reginald Edward Stubbs, governor of Hong Kong, with the aim of furthering the education of Chinese girls.<sup>18</sup> Grandfather donated \$30,000 towards the building, the second-highest donation after the Hong Kong government's \$50,000.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, the assembly hall was named Lee Hysan Hall. After the Second World War, St. Paul's Girls' College became St. Paul's Co-educational College.<sup>20</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mau and Foon, *Nineteenth Century Hong Kong*, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Lee Siu Yuen.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Hysan Last Will and Testament.

<sup>10</sup> Stokes, *Queen's College, Its History, 1862-1987*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *South China Morning Post*, March 1914.

<sup>12</sup> Mau and Foon, *Nineteenth Century Hong Kong*, p. 366.

<sup>13</sup> Welsh, *A History of Hong Kong*, p. 249.

<sup>14</sup> Cameron, *Power*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Hysan Last Will and Testament.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Cameron, *Power*, p.57.

<sup>18</sup> *St. Paul's Co-Educational College 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Album* (Hong Kong, 1991), p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> I was enrolled in the college from Grade Three, and remained in the school for many years. I have many fond memories of the school, especially during morning assembly in middle school when we would all be sitting facing a photograph of my grandfather. The friends I made remain my very good friends today. St. Paul's Co-ed is well known for its discipline and high academic standing. Today, it has transformed into a private school, and it remains one of the best schools in Hong Kong.

## CHAPTER 8

### East Point

In the early nineteenth century, East Point was an isolated promontory and was the most beautiful spot on the almost barren island of Hong Kong. It was surrounded by hills except on the harbour side, and from there one had a clear view of the mainland. In 1841, the firm Jardine, Matheson and Co., the premier British mercantile house in the Far East, established itself at East Point.

The company began with Dr. William Jardine, James Matheson and Hollingworth Magniac as trading partners. They had set up a business in the 1820s in Macao with interests extending to India. Dr. Jardine, a Scot from Dumfriesshire, had been a surgeon in the service of the East India Company. Matheson was the second son of Captain Donald Matheson of Shinness in Sutherland, where his family had long been established.<sup>1</sup> Magniac descended from a wealthy old French family called de Magnac. They were Huguenots who had escaped to England from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.<sup>2</sup> Around 1805, Hollingworth Magniac went to Macao, where his name was connected with an old established firm, Beale, Read and Co. He was probably also a partner in Charles Magniac and Co. After Charles died in 1824, the company became Magniac and Co., and Hollingworth and his brother Daniel were partners.<sup>3</sup>

The firm Magniac and Co. held a licence under the East India Company and acted as agents for William Jardine and James Matheson in Macao.<sup>4</sup> In the early days of this business connection, Jardine made trading voyages between India and China while Matheson remained in India to attend to the disposal of goods from the Far East. Hollingworth Magniac acted as agent for the sale of goods in Canton and Macao. Over time, the business increased so that, in 1827, when Magniac left China, Jardine and Matheson found it necessary to take up permanent residence in Macao, moving north to Canton in the trading season, as was done in those early days, and conducting their business there through the

“licensed” house of Magniac and Co. Jardine became a partner in 1826 and Matheson in 1828. On June 30, 1832, the firm of Magniac and Co. was dissolved, and Jardine, Matheson and Co. was established on July 1, 1832.<sup>5</sup>

In order to realize his vision that Hong Kong must become a new Guangzhou, Captain Charles Elliot, the superintendent, had encouraged the sale of land for development. The first fifty sites were auctioned off on June 14, 1841. The haste led to ambiguities with regard to the type of ownership. Jardine, Matheson and Co. purchased East Point from the Crown, with the assumption that it was to be either on a long lease or freehold. To their dismay, after the purchase all leases were fixed for the term of 75 years. Alexander Matheson’s objections resulted in the subsequent granting of a 999-year lease.<sup>6</sup>

Substantial offices, *godowns*, stables and dwelling houses were erected at East Point. A slipway was laid down for hauling up and repairing the schooners and brigs employed by the firm in the coastal trade of the day. The *godowns* abutted on the seafront and ships came alongside. Magnificent dwelling houses were erected for the partners on a hill two hundred feet above sea level, overlooking the harbour. The dwellings, surrounded by an unusually large compound with a fine avenue of trees, had wide verandas, spacious and lofty rooms and passages, and finely dressed stone exteriors. The property also included the homes of the number one and number two *taipans*, with a riding stable in between. Cannons were mounted on the seafront *godowns* to guard the compound from pirates.

The offices erected at East Point were used by the firm until 1864, when it moved to the central part of the town. The buildings were thereafter used as junior mess quarters. In 1905, Sir Robert Jardine died, and the firm was turned into a private limited liability company.

In 1920, experts from England went to Hong Kong to investigate land development around the harbour. In their opinion, the development in the west had reached its limits, and the colony’s future lay in the east around Kowloon Bay. It was around this time that Grandfather looked into buying land in that area for housing development. In front of East Point or Jardine Hill, the depth of the harbour at Lei Yue Mun was suitable for deep-draught vessels. Lei Yue Mun is a narrow entrance surrounded by steep hills, protecting the harbour from the prevailing easterly winds.

Grandfather had observed that the Kap Shui Mun entrance to the Hong Kong harbour was very shallow; therefore, all large ships entering the harbour had to go through Lei Yue Mun.

Although Grandfather had many business interests, his greatest passion was real estate and real estate developments. He was astute about the development of Hong Kong, so he purchased land and buildings in the central part of the island as well as in East Point, to carry out large-scale developments. On November 27, 1923, Lee Hysan Estate Company Limited was registered at 202 Queen's Road Central. It was established to purchase or lease lands and buildings and to construct, improve, control and manage roads, tramways, dwelling houses, hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of amusement, gardens and shops in the colony of Hong Kong.<sup>7</sup>

On January 17, 1924, after careful research, Grandfather bought East Point Hill (Jardine Hill) from John William Buchanan Jardine of Comlongon Castle, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, for the sum of \$3,850,960.35. It was the highest profile purchase of his life. Buying the original homestead, offices, and *godowns* of the *taipans* of Jardine Matheson represented what the Chinese had been able to accomplish in Hong Kong, despite great adversity.

It was difficult to construct buildings on Hong Kong island because of the hilly terrain. In order to build row housing, hills had to be levelled, and the soil used for landfill to create more flat land. Grandfather planned to use material from East Point Hill, which was the nearest available site for landfill to reclaim land for housing off North Point, which is in the middle of Kowloon Bay on the Hong Kong side. Given the rate of development in Wanchai and the rise in property values, as well as the growing population, North Point had an immense future. The completion of the reclamation of the foreshore at North Point would make available for immediate development a large area of ideally located building sites, which, Grandfather calculated, could be developed at a sizeable profit. The area to be reclaimed was 636,040 square feet, at a cost of \$1,040,369.<sup>8</sup>

According to Grandfather's calculations, 467 Chinese apartment houses could be built on the reclaimed land. Through mass production, the houses could be constructed more cheaply than those built by contractors in Hong Kong. Iron and cement would be imported under contract. Timber and brick would be bought in large quantities. The cost of each



house was estimated at \$11,400. Each flat could be let at \$20 per month, which would yield an 8 percent rate of interest from the investment when fully let. Since there were no reinforced concrete houses with sanitary plumbing available in the colony at such a low rental, the houses would be very attractive to middle-class tenants.<sup>9</sup>

When Grandfather purchased East Point Hill, he had an agreement with the Hong Kong government to use the soil of the hill for land reclamation off North Point. This would give him the right to the development of the reclaimed land. However, the government reneged on the agreement, and decided instead to use the soil from Morrison Hill, which was government-owned and, therefore, the reclaimed land would remain in government hands. Consequently, the development of Grandfather's East Point lands was stalled.<sup>10</sup> In order to earn income from the property, Grandfather turned it into a public garden and year-round amusement park for the Chinese, called the Lee Gardens. The Chinese population needed recreation areas since parks built by the colonial government were restricted. The *taipans'* mansions became restaurants, and the Lee Gardens was a huge financial success.

Grandfather planned well for his family. The Lee Hysan Estate Company, which owned East Point Hill and several other properties, was incorporated in 1924. He then purchased more land at the base of East Point Hill, and continued to develop the areas in the vicinity of the Lee Gardens, clearing slums and building wide streets and well-constructed houses. In 1925, the majority of the shares of the Lee Hysan Estate Company were assigned to members of the family. Grandfather retained 1,000 shares, and each son was given 500. Grandmother Wong Lan Fong held 250 shares. Grandfather's three concubines, Lee Cheung Hee, Lee So Han, and Lee Ng Yuet, were given 100 shares each. Each daughter received 70 shares, while smaller share allotments of 5, 4, 2 and 1 were given to various relatives.<sup>11</sup>

The formation of an estate company was a very wise decision by Grandfather, who continues to be respected by his descendants as a man of vision. Since family members are all shareholders, they need to work together for the common good. After his death, subsequent amendments were made to the articles of association by the descendants to make the share distribution more equitable for the daughters.

As an entrepreneur, Grandfather was always looking into new businesses. He loved Chinese opera and felt that there was a need for a new type of staging that would make changing scenery much easier. In 1926, he built the stately Lee Theatre on Percival Street and equipped it with a revolving stage which allowed for scenery changes as the actors walked along the stage. Cantonese opera was the most popular form of entertainment for the local Chinese population, and the theatre became hugely successful. The theatre had a beautiful high dome, decorated with dragon designs and lights,<sup>12</sup> and a movie screen was subsequently added. Many Chinese opera stars started their careers at the Lee Theatre.<sup>13</sup>

Grandfather continued to amass real estate holdings. Some were purchased in his own name, some in Grandmother's name, and some in the name of Lee Hysan Estate Company Ltd. In addition to East Point Hill, our family home on Kennedy Road and his office on Queen's Road Central, he owned many buildings and apartments on Percival Street, Lee Tung Street, Wanchai Road, Tai Wo Street, Stone Nullah Lane, Queen's Road East, Praya East, Second Street and Spring Garden Lane.<sup>14</sup>

After the Second World War, East Point Hill was gradually levelled for development, and the soil was used for reclamation in different parts of Hong Kong. In the 1950s, the Lee Gardens was levelled and developed, roads were built and high-rises went up. My own family moved into the penthouse in Embassy Court on Hysan Avenue, which was the first high-rise we owned. Subsequently, with the completion of Caroline Mansion and Tower Court, more family members moved into the vicinity.

The present boundaries of the original East Point Hill are: Jardine's Crescent on the east, Leighton Road on the south, Lee Garden Road on the west and Hennessy Road on the north. Today, this area and beyond is largely owned by Hysan Development Company; it comprises Caroline Centre, AIA Plaza, 111 Leighton Road, Hennessy Centre, Sunning Plaza, Sunning Court, Leighton Centre, One Hysan Avenue, Lee Theatre Plaza and the Lee Gardens.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Jardine Matheson and Company, 1832-1932* (internal company publication), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Hysan Company private papers.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, another prominent Hong Kong businessman bought land in West Point. He made it known that he thought Grandfather had made an error of judgement in buying East Point Hill. However, history has proved him wrong. Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Hysan Company private papers.

<sup>12</sup> A competition was held, and the winner, Li Ching Yat, a Chinese scholar and teacher at Queen's College, was selected to write the Chinese characters which adorned the theatre. Stokes, *Queen's College, Its History, 1862-1987*, p. 311.

<sup>13</sup> The Lee Theatre site has since been redeveloped as the Lee Theatre Plaza, completed in 1994. A replica of the original dome of the theatre has been placed on top of the new building. The Chinese couplets written by Li Ching Yat, which were put away for safe-keeping during construction, now adorn the foyer of the new plaza.

<sup>14</sup> Lee Hysan Company private papers.



## CHAPTER 9

### The Lee Family

**T**he Lee family is a very large and cohesive family. Up to this point, Grandfather has been the main character of the story. Now is the time to introduce the other characters.

Grandmother Lee Wong Lan Fong was the matriarch of the family. She was born on the third day of the sixth moon in 1880, which made her three months older than Grandfather. She was a fairly tall, big-boned woman with a round face. In the first years of their marriage, she was not able to have children. Then she gave birth to a daughter who died in infancy.

Grandmother had bound feet because she came from a fairly well-off family. Foot binding was a mark of social status to show that girls from such families did not need to work. I will always remember how difficult it was for Grandmother to walk, even though the bindings on her feet were later removed. Her feet were so misshapen that they were quite grotesque.

Even though Grandfather had a Western education, he was very traditional in many ways. Unlike many men at that time, who abandoned their wives by arranged marriage, he accepted his wife's position as supreme in the family. He respected Grandmother and put her on a pedestal. As we can see in the old family photographs, unless it was a group picture, he would be photographed only with her or with her and the children. When he purchased properties, a number of them were put in Grandmother's name. Like many Chinese men of that generation, Grandfather was an opium smoker, but when he found out that Grandmother was allergic to the smoke, he stopped smoking at home.

Although Grandmother was illiterate, Grandfather hired an instructor to teach her to sign her name in English. Apparently, the lessons went on for a very long time. She called English writing the drawing of chicken intestines. After World War II, I met the English teacher, an East Indian

woman who used to come to pay her respects to Grandmother at Chinese New Year.

I knew Grandmother as a very frugal person. She never smiled and never raised her voice. After the Second World War, whenever we went to see her, and that was very often because we all lived on the same family property, she was always sitting in the same chair, looking very unhappy.

Grandfather took a concubine, Cheung Mun Hee, from the city of Guangzhou (Canton), who became Yee Tai or Second Lady. When a concubine is brought into the home, she has to “kowtow” to the wife and serve her tea. From then on, she is part of the family. Second Lady was a petite woman, very slender, with a narrow face. She came from a humble family, as all concubines did; therefore, she did not have bound feet since poor girls had to work. Being a city girl, she was more knowledgeable and worldly than Grandmother.<sup>1</sup> Aside from that, no one seemed to know anything about her family. Concubines were chattels that belonged to the household. Second Lady accepted that custom, never rebelled, never talked back. As a result, no one, including her own daughters, knew anything about her background except the fact that she was about seven years younger than Grandfather. She was a real survivor in that system. In time, she gained respect from everyone in the family.

According to Chinese custom, a man showed his wealth by the number of children and concubines he had. Third Lady, So Han, was a singer in one of the tea houses Grandfather frequented. He took a liking to her and brought her home as a concubine.

In the early 1920s, Grandfather took another concubine, Ng Yuet, Fourth Lady, whom he met while he was being entertained with a few wealthy friends in a house of pleasure. The madam told the gentlemen one day that she had a new girl who was a virgin. This girl was available to the highest bidder, and Grandfather gave the highest bid. He had obviously been infatuated with her to have brought her home as a concubine.<sup>2</sup> Fourth Lady never lived in the Big House. She had her own living quarters close to Grandfather’s office, and he would often visit her during the day. Sometimes fourth son, J.S., would go with Grandfather, and he remembers that she was very kind to him whenever he didn’t feel well. J.S., who remained in Hong Kong to study Chinese, was the only

son who used to make the rounds with his father, visiting the different friends and business associates.<sup>3</sup>

Fourth Lady was fairly tall and very slim. After Grandfather died, she often poured her heart out to my mother who was only ten years her junior, and who was the only family member not in competition with her. She told Mother that it had been her own choice, and not her family's, to work in the house of pleasure where she met Grandfather. It was the only chance for a poor girl to meet and become the concubine of a rich man. She feared poverty and could not imagine being married to a poor man.

When Grandfather died, Fourth Lady was still very young and had the option to leave and remarry. She told Mother that she chose not to because she wanted to be with her children, her children being part of the Lee family. She turned to Buddhism, became a vegetarian, and befriended many nuns. After the Second World War, she moved into the Lee Building with her children, sixth son Jung Kong, seventh son Wing Tat, seventh daughter Shun Yee, and eighth daughter Shun Ngor.

When Second Lady became pregnant, there was great excitement in the family. Grandfather arranged to have a European midwife for the delivery.<sup>4</sup> It would be Grandfather's first child after seven years of marriage to Grandmother, who lost her daughter in infancy. Perhaps he felt he could not take a chance on this baby, and believed that a European midwife would be more knowledgeable and more hygienic than a Chinese midwife. On March 7, 1905, Second Lady gave birth to the first son, Ming Chak, my father.

When Father was born, Grandfather was delighted that he finally had an heir. Father's birth was also regarded as a lucky omen for the family, for from then on, Grandfather's import-export business flourished with Nam Hung Shipping Co.

According to Chinese custom, when a concubine has a son and the wife does not, the son is taken from his birth mother to live with the wife in order to bring her luck and fertility. This was the case with Father, who grew up in Grandmother's household. He did indeed bring her luck, for after the birth of a second son by Second Lady, Grandmother gave birth to two sons and two daughters: third son Wing Gun (later know as Hsiao Wo), fourth son Jung Sen, second daughter Shun Wah and fifth daughter Shun Yin. Father had a very special relationship with Grandmother

because he grew up around her, and she came to treat him as her own. She respected his judgement and that became very important for the entire family after Grandfather died.

Second Lady later gave birth to another son, second son Ming Hop, and three daughters: third daughter Shun Ying, fourth daughter Shun Kum and sixth daughter Shun Ho.

Grandmother was the head of the household and was regarded as the mother to all the children. The concubines not only had to serve the husband but the wife as well. The children of concubines call the wife "Mother" and their own mother "Aunt." All the children were legitimate and equal under Chinese law. Concubines were sometimes allowed to leave, if permission had been granted by the master of the household, or by the wife after the death of the master, but they could never take their own children with them. The children were part of the family.

Second Lady respected Grandmother and never argued with her. She would often walk away from a potential argument by saying that Heaven and Earth knew the truth.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, I remember Second Lady as a high-spirited person. She used to tell us children that, if we did not behave, she would personally take the skin off our backs! We were never afraid of her. Throughout her life, Second Lady did her best, not only for her children, but also for her grandchildren who needed help.<sup>6</sup>

In her later years, Second Lady gave all the jewellery that Grandfather had bought her to her daughters. She said she had no need of it. If there was a special family function at which she needed to wear jewellery, she would borrow it back.<sup>7</sup> After her seventieth birthday, she divided all her savings (savings from her housekeeping money, because she never had money of her own) and gave everything to her descendants. I remember receiving \$700 from her many years ago. She had her burial clothes made and prepared herself for an end that did not come until many years later.

After Grandmother died in 1956, Second Lady came to be regarded as the matriarch of the entire family. When she was in her eighties, she made her first trip out of China by flying to San Francisco. Not only did she not know a word of English, but she had never been on a plane before. She said she had no fear because Buddha would look after her. She lived a contented and healthy life. After having smoked a water pipe all her life, she finally died of lung cancer at the age of almost a hundred.

Father was born a healthy child, alert and sturdy, with a narrow face and a small stature like his mother, Second Lady. He had strong, square hands, and his skin was as dark and shiny as Grandfather's. He probably wore his hair in a queue when he was very young, as Grandfather did, since it was not until the Revolution of 1911 that Chinese men abandoned this custom. As a small child, Father lived in Hong Kong, and sometimes visited his grandparents in our ancestral village, Garlieu. Father once told me that Great-grandparents used to have only two meals a day, one early in the morning and the other between four or five in the afternoon. It seemed very strange to me, but that was the habit of the Chinese people who lived in the countryside.

As Grandfather became more prosperous, it was rumoured that bandits intended to kidnap his parents, so he moved them to Sunwui city, not far from Garlieu, and built them a house at 28 Juk Lum Lai.<sup>8</sup>

I have visited this house on a few occasions. It was constructed in the typical design for the wealthy of its day. Above the wooden gate that opens into a square courtyard were beautiful wall paintings. On the right-hand wall of the courtyard, just inside the gate, was an altar for burning incense to Chinese deities (this was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution). Large painted clay goldfish were placed on top of the drainpipes surrounding the courtyard. Rainwater would drain into the tails of the goldfish and pour out of their mouths and down into the pipes.

Opposite the door of the sitting room, ancestral tablets were displayed over a hand-carved altar table inlaid with marble. On top of the altar, incense burners, dishes of fruit and, on special occasions, food were placed as offerings to the ancestors. Antique armchairs stood on both sides of the sitting room. One of these chairs was supposed to be very special. On one of their trips back to Sunwui in the early 1980s, my father told cousin Hon Chiu (the eldest son of second uncle Ming Hop and Grandfather's eldest grandson) to sit in that particular chair, because it was rumoured that anyone who did so would be able to manage the family business well. Father had obviously done so himself on a previous occasion.<sup>9</sup> Cousin Hon Chiu has also proved the rumour to be true.

To the right and left off the sitting room were bedrooms, and at the back were the kitchen and the storehouse. There was a well in the



back courtyard. The bathroom and washing facilities were housed in a separate structure. At one side of the house was a spacious walled garden. A flight of stairs from the courtyard led to the roof, which commanded a clear view of the entire neighbourhood. This ancestral home still stands in its original form, despite the damage done by the civil war and the Communist liberation of 1949, and the subsequent Cultural Revolution. Our relatives in Sunwui take care of the house, but it is no longer used as a dwelling. It is almost like a family heirloom.

The family made frequent visits to this house during Great-grandparents' lifetime. Being the eldest son, Father was not only important to Grandfather, he was doted on by Great-grandparents. As a show of affection, Great-grandfather used to feed Father all the time when they were together, and even stuffed chicken legs into his mouth when he was asleep! He also told Father about the dreadful trip sailing across the Pacific Ocean to Gold Mountain (San Francisco) during the Gold Rush, and the life of Chinese people in America.<sup>10</sup> Even though Grandfather was the second son of Great-grandparents, Father's position in the family was considered so important that, when Great-grandfather died and his body travelled by boat along the river that ran past Garlieu village, Father sat in the front of the boat and Grandfather sat at the back, with the coffin in the middle. This was how the body was transported to the burial place according to our village custom.

Because of the repeated outbreaks of plague and the unsanitary conditions in Hong Kong, Grandfather moved his family to Macao in 1910 when Father was five years old. Most of the family remained there until 1918,<sup>11</sup> although Grandfather continued to work in Hong Kong. Their house in Macao was on Holland Yuen Street, which apparently was thus named because it was the site of a Dutch prisoner-of-war camp in the 1620s, during the conflict between Portugal and Holland. As a well-educated man, Grandfather was concerned about the education of his children, both sons and daughters, so he hired a well-known Chinese teacher, Chen Zibao, to instruct them during their absence from Hong Kong.<sup>12</sup>

Realizing the importance of an English education, Grandfather brought Father back to Hong Kong when he was older, and enrolled him in Queen's College, where Grandfather was an alumnus, and where he had made many friendships important to his business career. He

wanted the same advantages for his children. When Father was twelve, Grandfather sent him and a younger brother to England to be educated. Later, two sisters followed.

During the First World War, Grandfather bought a large piece of land on the side of a hill above Wanchai to build a home for himself and his family. Because of the war and labour problems, construction was delayed until 1920 when the architectural firm, Palmer and Turner, designed and built the Big House (*Dai Uk*). The address of the Big House, one of the grandest homes in Hong Kong, was 32 Kennedy Road which was later changed to number 74. To have a house with such a commanding view of the harbour was another high point of Grandfather's life. In the nineteenth century this would not have been possible for a Chinese family. Father did not see the Big House until he returned to Hong Kong from England in 1927.

The property on Kennedy Road was surrounded by a high stone wall, which contained beautiful gardens with fruit trees, bamboo groves, vegetable and flower gardens, chicken coops, pagodas, fountains, goldfish ponds and artificial hills and caves. Later on, tennis courts were added. From the gardens, there was a breathtaking view of Hong Kong. At the front gate of the Big House stood the guard house where tall Sikhs with shotguns stood guard around the clock. Sikhs were traditionally hired as guards in Hong Kong because the Chinese regarded them as fierce-looking. Our guard's family lived in their own compound beside the garden of the fountain of the goddess of Mercy. I have wonderful memories of our home on Kennedy Road; I was born there and our extended family lived there for many years.

The Big House, which consisted of three floors, was one of the grandest homes ever built in Hong Kong. The second and third floors were living quarters for the family, with large balconies and a kitchen on each floor. For family meals, the men and older boys were served on the second floor, and the women and children on the third floor.<sup>13</sup> Grandfather usually had his meals at home on the weekends.

The ground floor was reserved for entertaining. It consisted of an enormous front hall, which could easily accommodate a reception for five hundred guests, dining and sitting rooms, the library, the bamboo room and other entertaining rooms, and the main kitchen. At the back were the servants' quarters. From the front hall, one walked out onto the terrace



to a panoramic view of Hong Kong harbour. The house was filled with *objets d'art* from all over the world. Most of these were looted during the Second World War when the house was left empty.<sup>14</sup> There were opium beds in the downstairs hallway that were beautifully carved in Chinese black wood. We, the grandchildren, used to climb up on one of them and tell stories, since many small children could fit onto one bed.

The main hall of the Big House was very bright, but the side entrance to the stairs to the second and third floors was always very dark because of the wood panelling. After the Second World War, when we were playing, the older children would often run up those stairs saying that we were being chased by ghosts. I was the youngest in that group, and always the last to get to the top of the stairs.

The Big House was also used as a home away from home for all the Lee relatives or visitors from our ancestral village. There were many guest rooms behind the entertainment rooms on the ground floor, and anyone who needed a place to stay or a good meal was welcomed. Grandfather was known for his generosity which extended to distant relatives. Throughout his life, he made sure that his siblings were financially secure and that all his nieces and nephews were in good schools or were given good jobs. His sons carried on this tradition after his death.

The land where the Big House stood was so extensive that Grandfather decided to erect another building at the other end of the property higher up on the hill. It was a three-storey apartment built in the same style as the Big House, with a wide central staircase and large balconies for each of the six spacious and bright apartments. This was called *Lee Hong*, meaning the Lee Building, and was rented to Japanese and European tenants during Grandfather's lifetime. Although the two buildings were connected by numerous gardens, the family rarely saw the tenants.<sup>15</sup>

I wonder whether Grandfather could foresee that, as his family expanded, the Lee Building would be used by them. My family lived in both the Big House and the Lee Building until the beginning of the 1950s. Even after we moved into the Lee Building, my parents continued to entertain their business friends in the Big House, and all the grandchildren played in the same gardens.

Grandfather, Grandmother, the concubines (with the exception of Fourth Lady) and all the children lived together in the Big House. Grandmother lived on the second floor with her children. Second Lady

and Third Lady lived on the third floor with their children. Third Lady often quarrelled with Grandmother, and eventually she left the Big House to live with her son, Wing Kit (fifth son) in Causeway Bay in her own apartment on Percival Street.<sup>16</sup> She never moved back to Kennedy Road, not even after Grandfather died. I did not see her more than once or twice a year so I knew her the least.

Lee Shiu Yuen, son of Mun Yik, a younger cousin of Grandfather, has fond memories of Grandfather. When Shiu Yuen was a student at Queen's College, he would go to the Big House to visit Grandparents on Sundays and stay for the noonday meal, together with a number of other relatives. He said that Grandfather was a stern man who expected good behaviour and diligence from the younger generation, and he could be quite intimidating to those who were not up to his standard. After the Lee Theatre was built, Grandfather used to enjoy taking Shiu Yuen to the theatre after the noon-day meal on Sunday. He talked to him about the future of theatres, saying that the day would come when people would be able to watch movies lying down. Shiu Yuen took that to mean watching television at home.

Grandfather provided rent-free accommodations to all his relatives. In 1959, when I first came to Canada, I met an old lady who had emigrated from South China with her family to Ottawa many years before. When I was introduced to her, she told me that one of her relatives was married to one of my Lee relatives in Hong Kong, and that they had been provided with a free apartment by my grandfather. People always remember such unusual generosity.

The Lee family lived in the Big House until the Japanese occupation in 1941, when we all went into China. When we returned after the war, Grandmother and her children lived in the Big House, and the rest of us, including Fourth Lady, lived in the Lee Building, with the exception of Third Lady and her son, Fifth Uncle Wing Kit, who remained living in the Causeway Bay area.

In 1985, this property was redeveloped by Hysan Development Co. into a large residential complex known as Bamboo Grove. Some members of the Lee family still live there today.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Amy Lee Yuen.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Amy Lee Yuen.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lee Pak Chao.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee.

<sup>10</sup> Related by R.C. Lee.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Poh Kwan, private letter, April 30, 1966, Penang.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lee Shiu Yuen.

<sup>14</sup> However, a magnificent ivory tusk from a mammoth escaped the looters. It reclined on a beautifully carved blackwood base. It had originally belonged to a Frenchman in Shameen, Canton, who bought the raw tusk and commissioned an artist, Leung Wai, to carve on it the story of the Three Kingdoms. It took the artist years to finish the detailed figures and scenes. The Frenchman fell on hard times and had to use the tusk as collateral at the Banque de l'Indochine. Through the bank's comprador, Ho Wing Cheun, Grandfather redeemed it in 1926. As a small child playing in the main hall of the Big House, I used to love riding on this tusk as if it were a horse. Thinking back, I am amazed that no adult ever stopped me. This magnificent tusk has now been donated to the museum at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 10

### My Father

By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had become fashionable for the more adventurous and wealthy Chinese parents to send their children abroad to school – to France, Germany, England and Japan. These students were usually of university age. Most of the Chinese students from Hong Kong went to England. The only mode of travel was by ship via the Suez Canal, and the long trip took weeks.

Since Grandfather was well acquainted with the English educational system as well as with the necessity to be fluent in the language for business in Hong Kong, he thought it best to send his children to school in England so that they could be totally immersed in English traditions and culture.

In 1917, at the age of twelve, Father and his third brother, Wing Gun (Hsiao Wo) were sent to study in England with a governess. They lived in the home of their English guardian, a Mr. Churchill, and were tutored in preparation for university entrance. Father became very fond of Mr. Churchill with whom he continued to correspond after he returned to Hong Kong, and until his old tutor died.

It was in England that the Lee children acquired their English names: Father became Richard Charles and Third Uncle<sup>1</sup> was given the name Harold. Several years later, two younger sisters joined them in England, Shun Wah (Doris) and Shun Ying (Ansie), who were sent to a boarding school.

At that time, due to the difficulty of transportation, when the children were sent to England, they were expected to stay until they finished their education. The boys were told before they left that if they married non-Chinese while they were away, they would be disinherited.

In a letter to an old friend and neighbour in Macao, Father wrote about the Chinese he met in England:

Since my arrival in England, I have been well. Generally, the climate and life here are quite suitable to the Chinese.... In the town of Oxford, there were less than ten Chinese students including myself.... There are two Chinese in town, by the names of Zhou and Chen, from the village of Hoiping,<sup>2</sup> who are to be admired. They arrived here, by mistake, eleven years ago. They wanted to go to London, Ontario, Canada, to make a living. However, the tickets that were bought for them were incorrect, and neither knew that there were two Londons in the world. When they arrived in London, England, no relatives came to meet their boat, and they knew something was wrong. Not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, they realized they had arrived in a different part of the world, with no friends and with very little money. A few days later, they made their way to Oxford, and opened a laundry establishment. They worked hard and had become very well known for the best laundry service. Almost all the students in Oxford send their laundry to them. It shows that, for those who are abroad, with hard work, they will succeed. Being very busy, I am sorry I don't see them as often as I would like, and have forgotten their first names. These two can put many present-day overseas Chinese students to shame.

He went on to say that, despite the importance that parents put on education, many of the Chinese students in England were not really interested in studying:

The majority of the present-day overseas Chinese students have no idea how difficult it is to make a living. They are generally lazy, and are constantly complaining how difficult the subjects are, so they often skip the examinations. But, fearing rebukes from their parents, they enroll into colleges that do not have examinations and anyone can be accepted. There are many such colleges in both towns of Oxford and Cambridge. These students will write home to say that they have entered Oxford or Cambridge Universities, and their parents would not know any better. Their parents will send them money which they will spend lavishly. In three years' time, they will buy a degree to return to China. There is usually a lot of



fanfare when these students return home, but if they are ever asked, by someone who knows, which university they graduated from, Oxford or Cambridge, they would be in trouble....

China is so weak among so many strong nations, if the younger generation has no ability, how can we save China? These students are not capable of thinking. There are so many in China who want to study, but their families cannot afford to send them abroad. Those who have the chance to go abroad and not study hard are to be pitied.

And he concluded on a personal note:

Oxfordshire has the climate that makes people tired. Many go to the seaside during the summer to avoid illness. I will be going away and will return to Oxford at the end of the summer.<sup>3</sup>

We can tell from this letter that Father's lifelong wish to help China and the Chinese people was already emerging. In 1923, Father entered Pembroke College, Oxford, to study civil engineering, where he was known to the other undergraduates as Dickie Lee. His brother Harold later went into law. One of Father's friends during his Oxford years, Percy O'Brien, remembers Father as a sprightly individual who was always happy and smiling. He walked quickly, was always in a hurry, and very punctual. He was well dressed and carried a watch chain across his waistcoat. Father studied excessively hard and spent hours reading in the Radcliffe Science Library. At times he showed O'Brien some of his studies on the mathematics of engineering which O'Brien found very obtuse and difficult to understand.<sup>4</sup>

By the time he entered Pembroke, Father was already used to life in England, but life in the colleges was a different experience. Undergraduate behaviour was still controlled by the statute *de Moribus Conformandis* of 1636, even though rules had been modified. Colleges exacted small gate fines from those who were not back in college by a certain hour in the evening. Although tobacco could be purchased (its sale having been banned in 1636), no undergraduate was allowed to smoke in academic dress. A rule prohibiting students from keeping motor cars had been rescinded, and so Father was able to own one. Students were not



allowed to play billiards before one o'clock in the afternoon or after ten o'clock at night, and they were forbidden to loiter at stage doors, attend public race meetings or take part in shooting and other sports. Their opportunities for dancing, drinking and dining were carefully regulated. A male undergraduate was not allowed to enter the room of a female undergraduate, but a female student was allowed to enter the room of a male with a chaperone, with special leave from the head of her college.<sup>5</sup>

Pembroke had some well-established customs that no longer exist. Undergraduates were obliged to attend college chapel daily at eight o'clock in the morning under the threat of a fine of two shillings and sixpence. Less onerous was the penalty for talking "shop" in the hall. The perpetrator could be challenged to drink one or more pints of beer without pause from a tankard marked by pegs within, to bring the ego down a peg or two.<sup>6</sup>

Father was privileged to have lodgings in the Old Quadrangle, regarded as superior by the students. His rooms were on the ground floor, with a bedroom, a small pantry and a fairly large sitting/dining/study room with a fireplace. The communal rooms were in the back of the quadrangle, and the undergraduates sometimes had to trudge through snow and ice in the winter to reach them. There was no college nurse or doctor in those days; the undergraduates were supposed to be tough. In the evening, the gates were closed at nine o'clock when the Old Town clock chimed. Since latecomers were fined, the students found ways of climbing into the residences without being caught.<sup>7</sup>

The residences were taken care of by "scouts," who were essential to college life. Each scout was in charge of a "staircase," meaning a set of rooms that branched off from a staircase. In some respects, a scout was like a servant, but in many ways he was more like a "wife and parent" to his men. He cared for their general welfare, looked after them when they were ill, advised them, got them out of trouble and put them to bed when they were drunk. Father was very fortunate to have a fine scout named Fred. He would light Father's fire, clean his room, make his bed and do his laundry. It was also Fred's duty to make Father's breakfast and lunch and look after his parties.<sup>8</sup>

The Master of Pembroke during Father's time was Dr. Holmes Dudden, a man of great distinction and ability, a very good administrator and an author of some note. To be invited to dine at Pembroke was

much sought after in the 1920s, because of its fine table and excellent wines.<sup>9</sup> All Oxford undergraduates boarded in the colleges, and they were required to have dinner with the master and the fellows in the hall. In fact, although undergraduates were free to choose whether they wanted to attend the lectures, they were strictly advised to attend the dinners. If an undergraduate's annual attendance at the dinners was not sufficient, he would lose the right to sit for examinations. At each table, ten to twelve undergraduates who had joined the college in the same year would sit together. In spite of the fact that the subjects they took were different, they usually became good friends, bonded by the habit of eating meals at the same table.

Chinese students studying in England in those days were very well treated and were not subject to the discrimination they encountered at home. They were able to make friends and contacts that were invaluable to them throughout their lives. During his university days, Father made some very good friends with whom he kept in touch all his life. Many became prominent citizens in their own countries. As already noted, one was Percy O'Brien, who entered Pembroke in 1924 to read Chemistry and later became a tutor and Fellow of Pembroke. Until he retired in 1974, he was director of the Nuffield Department of Clinical Biochemistry in the Oxford Medical School.

Another was Qian Changzhao, who became an important official in China under the Nationalist leader Chiang Kaishek. Both Qian and Father subsequently devoted themselves to the betterment of the lives of the Chinese. While Father spent most of his life in Hong Kong, Qian remained in China. After the Nationalist government was ousted, Qian served the government of the People's Republic of China as their chief economic advisor. Qian was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution.

In the early 1960s, the two men were able to resume the friendship that had been interrupted during the Chinese civil war (1945–49) and the subsequent restrictions put on its population imposed by the Chinese government.

Some of Father's other contemporaries at Oxford were Liu Jia, Chiang Kaishek's representative at the United Nations in the 1950s; and Konosuke Koike, a graduate of Tokyo University, who became chairman of Yamaichi Securities. Konosuke Koike entered Pembroke College in 1923. Since he and Father both entered Pembroke in the same year, they

sat at the same table for dinners. They also played sports together and became close friends. In winter, when the British students played rugby, Father and Koike would go to the gymnasium to box.<sup>10</sup> Boxing was a favourite sport of many Pembroke men, and Father loved it even though it resulted in a broken nose. Although Father lost contact with Koike because of the Pacific War, the two men were able to pick up where they left off in the late 1960s.

The one friend Father made who was not a student at Oxford was Ley On, whom we came to call Uncle. Ley On was adopted by a family who lived in the same vicinity as our ancestral village. He was badly treated, so in his teens he sold himself as an indentured labourer to Europe during the First World War. At the end of the war, when his contract was over, he stowed away on an ocean liner, not knowing where it was going. He arrived in France and found himself unable to communicate with anyone, so he stowed away again on another boat, and arrived in London. This time he decided to stay and try to make a living there. Ley On was an enterprising young man and he started a small Chinese restaurant in London, catering mainly to overseas Chinese students. That was around the same time as Father and Third Uncle were in England. Father and his friends would go to Ley On's restaurant whenever they were in London. Father used to tell me that Ley On made his tofu with an ingredient that gave his patrons diarrhea! Despite that, the two young men became good friends. I am sure Father admired Ley On for his diligence and entrepreneurial spirit. Ley On went on to become a successful restaurateur in London and the owner of many racehorses. His restaurant was frequented by famous movie stars who befriended him. Probably because he was tall and dark and had a classic Chinese face, with high cheekbones and slanted eyes, he was given small parts in Hollywood movies.

I first met Uncle Ley On when he stayed with us in Hong Kong in the early 1950s, by which time he had become an alcoholic. I remember Father telling him, "It's a custom in Hong Kong not to drink before sundown!"

Father had high ideals and was a leader at Pembroke. He became president of the Chinese Students' Union of Europe in 1925-26. He knew by then that he would spend his life helping his countrymen. He kept all the menus of the Union dinners on which he and his fellow students sketched their plans for a brave new China.

In 1927, upon graduation from Oxford University, Father returned to Hong Kong at the age of twenty-two, after having been away for ten years. It was his first time to see the Big House. His plan was to go back to England to complete his practical engineering training. Grandfather was delighted to have his eldest son back, and this time, he wanted to see his son get married before leaving again. The word was out, and many girls were brought to Grandmother for her approval.

The Hong Kong that Father returned to was a society that he did not remember. He had been treated as an equal in England, and was surprised by the anti-Chinese discrimination in a colony where the British still believed that they were the master race. There was segregation in every facet of life in the colony. In hospitals and in the Hong Kong civil service, segregation persisted until the Second World War. An example was the Matilda Hospital on the Peak, which in 1940 refused to admit an American woman because she was married to a Chinese. It was not until 1942 that the civil service dropped the requirement that all candidates for positions should be of pure European descent. As late as 1992, all senior posts in the civil service were held by British officers. It was the policy of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank not to have Chinese on the board, and many British firms forbade employees to marry non-British women.

Father was a diligent student who benefited from the British liberal education that taught the equality of men. Therefore, when he returned to Hong Kong, he could not accept the stigma of being a second-class citizen.

Having been used to riding in England, Father wanted to join the Hong Kong Jockey Club but was refused entry because he was Chinese. Grandfather immediately said, "We don't need them. We will start a Chinese Jockey Club." That was considered a threat to the Hong Kong Jockey Club because it depended on the income from bets placed by the Chinese population. The club quickly made a decision to allow Father to ride there.<sup>11</sup> Father also wanted to join the Hong Kong Club and was turned down because he was Chinese – an insult he never forgot.<sup>12</sup>

Hong Kong's colonial snobbery was described by Ely Kadoorie, a successful merchant in Shanghai as well as in Hong Kong, as a small "shopkeeper's mentality." He was comparing international Shanghai to a very British Hong Kong. However, at least the racial chasm in business was narrowing, for the Chinese were not excluded from any commercial



activities. Father realized that Hong Kong was a place to do business but, as someone who believed in the brotherhood of man, it was not a society in which he would choose to live.

Because Father was a sociable young man, he was always seen with a group of friends. One day in the summer of 1927, not long after he returned from England, Father was with his friends on a beach picnic when two girls dropped by on their way home from a tennis game. As one of them caught his eye, he asked a girl in his group, Julia Wong, to introduce him. Julia said, "Don't bother, she's just my younger sister!" Father persisted, and thereby met Esther Yewpick Wong (my mother). They ended up spending the rest of the afternoon together, and Father drove her home.

For the next few months, with the approval of their families, Father saw a good deal of Mother. He invited her and other friends to the tea dances at the Hong Kong Hotel, even though he did not like to dance.

Mother was only seventeen then, and a student at the Diocesan Girls' School, so she was not part of the social scene in Hong Kong. It was a whirlwind courtship and they fell in love.<sup>13</sup> However, Mother was not ready to get married; she wanted to finish school first. She was reluctant to leave home where she had a lot of freedom; she knew she would be marrying into a very traditional family.

The Lee grandparents were delighted that their son had found someone so suitable. When Father proposed, they went to see Mother's parents to ask for their consent, but Mother insisted that she was just not ready to get married. Grandfather Lee came up with a brilliant idea: he would send Mother to study at Oxford, where Father was to finish his practical training. Mother could study Portuguese to help in the Lee family business. He also promised to take her parents on a trip around the world to visit the young couple the following year. That did it, and Mother agreed to get married.

All this happened so quickly that my parents did not really have time to get to know each other very well. Theirs was a relationship that grew with the years together, establishing mutual trust, understanding and respect that lasted throughout their lives.

The Wongs, Mother's family, were modern and progressive. They were also Christians. Her father, Joseph M. Wong, was an accountant, fluent in English and well respected in Hong Kong society. He was good friends with notables such as Sir Robert Hotung and Sir Shou Son Chau. The Wongs lived a luxurious life on Prince Edward Road. When Mother and her siblings were growing up, they had not only a large household staff and gardeners, but also four cars so that the growing children could drive themselves around. Mother always prided herself that her father was the first person in Hong Kong to own a motor car when cars were first imported into the colony in 1912, despite the fact that the Chinese community described cars as "coughing, spluttering, honking demons."

The Wong grandparents, Joseph and Jeannie, had eleven children of whom eight were girls. Mother was the number-five daughter. Mother and her siblings lived a carefree life, driving everywhere, swimming, playing tennis and dancing. Mother said she used to get caught by the police for speeding, probably on her way to buy sweets, of which chocolates were her favourite. Mother also took flying lessons but never obtained her licence.

Mother was fond and proud of her family. Her paternal grandfather, my Great-grandfather Wong Chuen, had gone to the West Indies as a young man to work as a labourer. He returned to China with a sizeable fortune when he was in his early thirties, then moved to Hong Kong to work as a court interpreter because of his good knowledge of English.<sup>14</sup>

He chose a wife from a convent school run by German nuns, a girl whose father and brother were both ministers of the church. She spoke not only English and Chinese, but also German, and she wore only European clothes. That was unusual for a Chinese girl at that time. The two did not know each other well when they got married. Great-grandmother Wong later told her grandchildren she wondered on her wedding day why her wealthy husband had such rough hands.

As a court interpreter, Great-grandfather Wong was well paid. The Wongs lived on a large estate near Boundary Street in Kowloon. (The land was subsequently repossessed by the Hong Kong government, and they were relocated to present-day Prince Edward Road.)

Mother and her siblings were full of stories of the fun they had as children when they visited their grandparents. The person who was held



in highest esteem by the grandchildren was my Great-grandmother Wong, the matriarch of the Wong clan. She loved having them around and used to teach them to sing German songs. She was religious and encouraged the grandchildren to sing hymns to her by rewarding them each time. She spent her time doing charitable work, which continued even after she had a stroke and was confined to a wheelchair. Her grandchildren wondered whether, in her later years, she chose a concubine for her husband because she was tired of bearing children. The real reason for finding a concubine was to have someone willing to stay in the village in China to look after her in-laws; Great-grandfather Wong was the only son, and Great-grandmother Wong certainly did not want that job. There were a total of sixteen children, of which eleven were her own.

In his ancestral village, Ho Pak Kiu, Great-grandfather Wong was regarded as the son who made good. When he returned to Dong Guan (Guangdong Province) from abroad, he built a house with gun towers for the family in his ancestral village,. The Wongs were *Hakkas* who often had to fight with their neighbours to protect the water supply needed for their fields. *Hakkas* were immigrants or “guest people” from northern China who were later settlers in south China, and therefore got poorer land than the *Punti* (locals).

The Wongs owned rice fields, leichee orchards and a peanut oil factory in Ho Pak Kiu. Whenever Great-grandfather Wong or any of his sons returned from Hong Kong to check on the business, they had to be met at the train station by an armed brigade for protection.<sup>15</sup> Because of the deterioration of law and order in China, rural militarization had become the norm, and armed guards were standard for the landlords, especially absentee landlords.

Traditionally, the *Punti* and the *Hakka* did not intermarry. Father, being a *Punti*, used to tease Mother that *Hakka* women had big feet, considered ugly in traditional Chinese thinking. *Hakka* women never bound their feet because they did a large share of the work in the fields, and besides, they were needed to help in the fighting when necessary.

It was Great-grandfather Wong's wish that his descendants would one day return to the ancestral village, so at the entrance of the house he placed a large picture entitled *Hundred Birds Returning to the Nest*. However, only the eighth son, who was the first-born of the concubine, actually lived and remained in the village, looking after the rice fields

and the business. The rest of the children chose to live in Hong Kong and, with the political unrest that existed over the years in China, it was at times impossible for them to return even for a visit. The only time a number of them went back was during the Second World War, after the surrender of Hong Kong. Food was scarce under Japanese occupation, but for those who owned rice fields in China, there was always enough to eat in the village.

Great-grandfather Wong was well known and respected in Hong Kong. When he died, many people came to pay their respects by kowtowing all the way from the entrance to the altar of their red house on Prince Edward Road. He had a grand funeral, with four white horses drawing the carriage that carried his coffin. So many flowers were sent to the family that the colony's shops were said to have run out of flowers.<sup>16</sup>

Mother's father, Joseph, was the second son. He was a prosperous and well-respected member of Hong Kong society and served in 1913 as the first president of the Chinese Association of Chartered Accountants. During the First World War, he was in the police reserve in Hong Kong, when many of the British went to fight in Europe and the vacancy had to be filled. His daughters Josephine and Jennie remember him looking very handsome in his white uniform.

Whenever there was a shortage of personnel, Grandfather Wong would fill in as interpreter in the law courts. He became a Justice of the Peace in 1923, and subsequently was decorated with the Badge of Honour by King George VI. In the first year of the Republic of China, he was also awarded the fourth-level *Gar Wo* badge by Dr. Sun Yatsen. After his first wife died childless, he married Jeannie Maxwell, my grandmother. Jeannie's nickname was Beauty, because she was a beautiful Eurasian girl. Great-grandmother Wong had encouraged her sons to marry Eurasians because she wanted beautiful grandchildren, and she had many.

Grandmother Jeannie Maxwell Wong was one of four children and the only daughter of John Maxwell and a Chinese woman whose name we don't know, because she was always referred to as Grandmother by Mother and her siblings.

John Maxwell went to Hong Kong from Scotland in the nineteenth century; he stayed on to work and to get married. He chose a Chinese girl from an orphanage which was the precursor of the Po Leung Kuk, an institution established in 1878 by a group of wealthy and influential

Chinese gentlemen to protect destitute women and children. That was really his only option, since there were very few European women of marriageable age of his own class, and no Chinese girl from a good family would consider him eligible. Great-grandfather Maxwell worked as a policeman in Hong Kong, and by all accounts, he was a good father to his children.

In those days, Eurasians did not belong fully to either the Chinese or the European communities, so they had to try very hard to be one or the other. Grandmother Jeannie Maxwell Wong became more Chinese than the Chinese. She could understand and speak English, but she could read only Chinese. She was the authority on Chinese customs, and everyone in the Wong family always consulted her. I remember her in her later years looking very serene in a Chinese *cheongsam*, wearing her hair in a bun.

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Since Father had to return to England to complete his practical engineering training, my parents' wedding was set to take place on February 28, 1928, at St. John's Cathedral. Mother always said that she wished the fashion for wedding dresses that year had been long gowns instead of short, but, having to be fashionable (Shanghai being the trend setter), she had a short wedding dress of silver lace trimmed with pearls, and she carried white roses.

Mother was a beautiful girl, tall for a Chinese and rather big-boned. She had to wear low-heeled shoes so that she would not look taller than Father. In fact, she kept growing after they were married and became quite a bit taller than he. She was as fair-skinned as Father was dark, with dark brown hair covered by her wedding head-piece that came down to her eyebrows, again according to the fashion of the day. She had a large wedding party, with her sisters and cousins in dresses of different pastel colours and decorated with rosettes. They were beautiful young women and girls, all grandchildren of Great-grandmother Wong.

The cathedral was thronged with Chinese and European guests, and many people had to stand outside because they could not get in. The wedding was performed by the Very Rev. A. Swann, Dean of Hong Kong, who broke tradition by officiating at a Chinese wedding for the first time. Hong Kong society was so divided between the Chinese and

the Europeans that it was only on occasions like these that the two groups were brought together socially.

The reception was held at the Lee Gardens where a huge *matshed* (a structure of bamboo and straw) was erected, because the taipans' houses were not large enough to accommodate the two thousand guests. The Hong Kong Hotel, which was one of Father's favourites, catered the affair. A dais was erected to support a six-tier wedding cake. Sir Robert Hotung, who was a good friend of Grandfather Lee and Grandfather Wong, as well as Great-grandfather Wong Chuen, toasted my parents.

In his speech, Sir Robert referred to the speech that Father had made, as the president of the Central Union of Chinese Students in Great Britain and Ireland, regarding his sentiments towards China. Little did Sir Robert know that his reference would turn out to be a prophecy, that Father would give his service and knowledge, freely, during his lifetime, for the benefit of the Chinese people.

Dr. Robert H. Kotewall, a member of the Legislative Council, toasted the health of the parents of the bridal pair, and the happiness of the newly married couple. Father thanked them and said he was overwhelmed with gratitude by all the kind words.

After the wedding, my parents went on their honeymoon by boat to Europe. They sailed through the Suez Canal and did what most tourists do in Egypt, riding camels and visiting the Sphinx and pyramids. Their first stop in Europe was Switzerland, where Mother met Third Uncle, Harold, for the first time. He was attending school there. Subsequently, they went to England, where Mother met Father's sisters Doris and Ansie (Second and Third Aunts), who were in a boarding school for girls.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All Uncles and Aunts preceded by a number are siblings of Father.

<sup>2</sup> A village in south China, it is also the Lee family's original ancestral village. Chinese tend to be very clannish, and I am sure Father was very proud that these two men were from the same area as our family.

<sup>3</sup> *Zibao Xuexiao Nianbao* (Zibao School Magazine), July 31, 1921, pp. 5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> V.H.H. Green, *A History of Oxford* (London, 1974), pp. 188-89.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 30, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Percy O'Brien, Oxford, October 17, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Konosuke Koike, article in *Yamabiko*, a bi-monthly newspaper published by Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., circulated only among the Yamaichi Group, September 7, 1971, translated by Shinichi Shiraishi, Deputy President of Yamaichi Securities.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 16.

<sup>13</sup> One day, my father confessed to Mother that he was the son of a concubine and not of Grandmother. He wondered if it would matter to their relationship. Because of his special relationship with Grandmother, everyone had taken it for granted that he was her own son. Mother said no, it didn't matter. After all, that was the way traditional Chinese families were in those days, even though her own parents were very different. Interview with Esther Lee.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Daniel Wong.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Josephine Chiu and Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.



## CHAPTER 11

### Assassination

**D**uring Father's visit to Hong Kong, Grandfather became embroiled in a court case over the Yue Sing firm's opium licence from the government of Macao.

The Yue Sing firm had held the opium monopoly since 1924.<sup>1</sup> It was formed under the sole proprietorship of Lee Yue Sing, Grandfather's older brother. A third of the company was owned by the Lee family, and Grandfather was the general manager.

In March 1927, the Portuguese government announced in the *Boletim Oficial* that, under the agreement reached at the Opium Conference held in Geneva between November 1924 and February 1925 and ratified on March 2, 1926, the monopoly system under which opium had been imported, prepared, sold and distributed would come to an end. Therefore, its contract with the Yue Sing firm would be terminated as of July 1, 1927 and replaced by a government monopoly under the superintendence of the Inspector of Consumption Taxes. It established an Opium Administration, and Pedro Jose Lobo was appointed as administrator.

By 1927, a quarter of the original investment of \$3 million had been returned to the subscribers of Yue Sing, but the winding-up proceedings in the courts of Macao would mean that the rest of the investment would be lost when the opium farm was taken over by the Macao government, and the subscribers to the firm were supposed to accept this arrangement.

Then Grandfather discovered that the Macao government had not taken back the licence, but had given it to another company, the Yau Sing Company,<sup>2</sup> for a payment of \$120,000. The company had opened an account at a branch of the Mercantile Bank of India in Hong Kong, and the comprador of the bank confirmed that the opium monopoly had been obtained by the Yau Sing Company by tender from the government of Macao. When the company was opened for subscription, a friend of Grandfather was approached to buy shares, and he came to Grandfather for advice.



Grandfather believed that, since the Macao government had terminated the contract with Yue Sing, that same government could not legally give a new contract to any other firm. He sent a petition to the governor of Macao, requesting fair treatment for his firm and an inquiry into the matter, as well as the return, in due course, of the original deposit by Yue Sing to the Portuguese government. He also sent the petition to the legislative councillors, sixteen lawyers in Macao and the Portuguese consul-general in Hong Kong. In his petition, the name of Pedro Jose Lobo was implicated.

In the spring of 1928, during the preparation of my parents' wedding, Pedro Jose Lobo sued Grandfather for libel<sup>3</sup> and asked the Hong Kong court for an injunction to prevent him from sending further petitions to the governor of Macao. During the period leading up to the trial, Grandfather received letters threatening his life, saying also that bombs would be thrown at my parents' wedding. Grandfather ignored these letters even though friends and relatives advised him to be careful and to change his routine. The wedding went smoothly, my parents left for Europe, and the threats were forgotten. The marriage of Grandfather's second son, Ming Hop, which occurred shortly after my parents' wedding, also went without incident.<sup>4</sup> On April 17, Chief Justice Henry Gollan of the Supreme Court in Hong Kong gave judgement in Grandfather's favour.<sup>5</sup> And Grandfather believed that the incident was over and that justice would be done by the governor of Macao.<sup>6</sup> He looked forward to an even brighter future.

On April 30, 1928, at one o'clock in the afternoon, a dozen members of the Yue Kee Chinese Club on Wellington Street were having *tiffin* (lunch), served by *foki* (waiters). Suddenly, they were startled by the sound of three shots fired in quick succession, followed by cries of *gau meng* (save life.) Two club *foki* rushed down the staircase.

One *foki* by the name of Law Lau was the first to reach the bottom of the stairs. Going along the cement corridor, he saw the victim holding onto the wall, his face extremely pale. It was obvious that he was seriously injured. Law Lau, however, paid little attention to him, and instead followed a man in white trousers and a short jacket, who darted through the passage leading from the club. By the time Law Lau had turned the corner, the man was nowhere to be seen.

Grandfather had been shot. When other members of the club found him lying in the corridor, he was already dead. He had been shot three times. One bullet had pierced the left shoulder, another had lodged in the stomach and a third had entered the back of his neck. The last shot had apparently been fired when he turned around. One bullet had struck the cement corridor after striking him.

Two Indian constables arrived on the scene shortly afterwards. An ambulance was called, and the body was taken to the mortuary. Then the Hon. Mr. E.D.C. Wolfe, captain superintendent of police, arrived with Detective Inspector Murphy, Sub-Inspector Lane, and other officers. A revolver was found in the stairway of the Yue Kee Club. It had been thrown away by the murderer when he made his escape, and was found to contain three empty chambers and three live shells. The Lee family was called, and Grandmother, the concubines and a number of friends came to identify the body.

The *South China Morning Post* of Tuesday, May 1, 1928, called the assassination one of the most sensational crimes ever perpetrated in the colony, because the victim had been one of the best-known businessmen in Hong Kong, and the crime had been committed in broad daylight in the centre of the city. It was clear that the murder had been well planned.

The Yue Kee Chinese Club members confirmed that, in addition to taking *tiffin* (lunch) regularly at the club, Grandfather had frequently eaten his evening meal there as well. His custom of visiting the club at *tiffin* time was well known. The assassin was able to choose a quiet spot, and knew with a degree of certainty what time his victim would be entering the premises. One member of the club stated that, about five or six years before, a rich Chinese merchant named Lo Chuk Wan had been assassinated on the steps, but this time, the crime had been committed in the cement corridor outside the main entrance to the club. The murderer apparently had concealed himself at one side of the corridor and fired at his victim from behind.

The club was situated on the third floor of a building on Wellington Street, but the main entrance was on Kau Yu Fong Lane. This was a quiet thoroughfare, generally deserted by pedestrians during the greater part of the day. Joining Wellington Street and Kau Yu Fong Lane was a flight of stone steps leading to a small lane that gave direct access to the club.

Kau Yu Fong Lane had once been a somewhat notorious street, the rendezvous of undesirable characters, especially members of alleged secret societies. However, as more business premises had opened in the immediate neighbourhood, the street had become a quiet backwater, and little frequented.

While the motive for the crime was unknown, Grandfather's decision to ignore the warnings in the threatening letters he received earlier clearly had cost him his life.<sup>7</sup> He was forty-seven years old.

The South China Athletic Association flew its flag at half-mast as a mark of respect for their late president. The Lee Theatre and the Lee Gardens were closed to the public for forty-nine days in mourning for the proprietor. Grandfather's body lay in the Lee Gardens where many friends called to pay their respects. According to old Chinese custom, the body was accompanied by the spouse, concubines and descendants, during which time monks from different monasteries said prayers to ensure a smooth transition into the next world. Grandfather was a well-known figure among Chinese business circles in Nam Pak Hong, and was one of the largest landowners in the colony. He was also well liked by westerners resident in Hong Kong, for his charming manners.

The Lee family offered a reward of \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest of the assassin but, despite the police having many leads and making some arrests, the murderer was never caught. The entire family was in shock. Grandfather left behind a wife, three concubines, seven sons and six surviving daughters, with daughter number eight<sup>8</sup> on the way.

My parents and three of Father's siblings, Harold, Doris and Ansie, were in England when the news reached them. Although they immediately began their return journey, travel by boat through the Suez Canal was so slow that they missed the funeral service. The Buddhist service was held on June 25, after a long funeral procession from his home at 74 Kennedy Road to the pavilion in Kennedy Tower. Grandfather was buried in a beautiful site overlooking the ocean, in the Permanent Cemetery in Aberdeen.

Later, at Lady Clara Hotung's suggestion, a *matshed* was specially built in the Lee Gardens. Buddhist services were held for seven days to pacify Grandfather's ghost and to raise his soul from suffering in the next world.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Yue Sing firm had been formed in 1924 under the sole proprietorship of Lee Yue Sing, Grandfather's older brother's son. It had the right to prepare and retain opium in Macao and to import and export. Throughout the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century, not only was the Hong Kong government involved in the opium trade, but also the Portuguese government in Macao was involved. These governments sold licences to companies which dealt in opium; there were also government-licensed opium dens. The governments were in competition with the smugglers, who sold their stock at a much lower price.

According to the Geneva Conventions of 1924-25, and article VI of the Opium Agreement signed on February 11, 1925, the right to an opium farm was not to be leased to any person whomever, and the export of opium whether raw or prepared from any territory was to be prohibited.

<sup>2</sup> In June 1927, Grandfather had heard a rumour that the opium business in Macao had been given to Lu Kin Butt, the manager who had worked under Grandfather in the Yue Sing firm in the Portuguese colony. In addition to his former manager, two others had been appointed; both were smugglers well known to the police. The Yau Sing company had been formed, which obtained the opium monopoly contract, and had an office in the same building as the new Opium Administration in Macao. It had also opened an office in Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> The alleged libel related to the Macao opium monopoly and stated that the Yau Sing company of Macao had paid \$120,000 to acquire control of the monopoly. The plaintiff's case was that this reflected discredit on himself as a government officer connected with the opium administration.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Amy Lee Yuen.

<sup>5</sup> In court, the plaintiff's lawyer, C.G. Alabaster, asked why Grandfather had had eight hundred copies of the petition printed and whether he was planning to distribute it worldwide. Grandfather answered that if he had had fewer printed it still would have cost him \$400. The letter from Grandfather's friend was read into the record and stated: "The Yau Sing Company has acquired this opium monopoly not by successful tender in open competition, but through the influence of certain persons [i.e., Mr. Lobo]. The Government of Macao allowed this company to do what they liked."

<sup>6</sup> Information on this case is based on reports in the *South China Morning Post*, March-May, 1928.

<sup>7</sup> The entire chapter is based on information from the *South China Morning Post*, April 29, 30 and May 1, 1928.

<sup>8</sup> This was Shun Ngor, daughter of Fourth Lady.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Lianjue (Lady Clara Hotung), *Mingshan Youji* (Memories on Famous Mountains) (Hong Kong, 1934), p. 105.

## CHAPTER 12

### Father as Head of the Family

At the age of twenty-three, Father became the head of the family. Mother, at eighteen, was no longer a student, but his partner. Although Grandmother was the sole executrix of Grandfather's will, she had no knowledge of business and was also illiterate. She depended entirely upon Father, and it was his responsibility to make sure the huge family was taken care of. In order to raise large sums of money for payment of death duties, he arranged for the sale of many of Grandfather's shares. For the first time in his life, he had to approach friends of Grandfather to borrow money. Father suffered insulting experiences, which he never forgot, when some of Grandfather's "friends" refused to open the door when he called on them. One of the exceptions was Arthur Morse, chief accountant of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. It was very intimidating for Father, but the kindness and consideration shown to him by Morse made them fast friends for the rest of their lives, and the Bank has benefited ever since.

Grandfather had mortgages on many of his properties, the largest of which was East Point Hill (the Lee Gardens), which was held by Jardine. This meant that, if the family reneged on the payment, the property would be repossessed. Father borrowed money from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank to pay off the mortgage; the bank took it over as well as other mortgages,<sup>1</sup> and arranged a monthly payment that was workable for the family.

Many people approached Grandmother to buy our properties, but with Father's encouragement, she refused to part with any of them. From then on, and for many years, the entire family lived on a tight budget in order to pay off the mortgages on our extensive holdings from the rents collected. We were land-rich and cash-poor. The entire family was very thankful that Grandmother refused to sell any of the properties, as over the years, real estate remained the main business of the family.



When Grandfather's estate duties were settled, Father remained in Hong Kong, working for the Lee & Orange architectural firm to complete his practical training. One of his projects was the lengthening of the No.1 Dock of the Whampoa Dockyard in Kowloon.<sup>2</sup> Today, in the same location, there is a shopping centre in the shape of an ocean liner.

My parents lived in the Big House with Grandmother and the rest of the family. With all the mortgage and loan payments, there was very little money to go around, and Grandmother held the purse strings tightly. While Father was completing his training, he had no income. Mother found herself trapped in an old-fashioned, traditional household which was totally different from her own, and, because Father was not earning an independent income, she had no financial freedom. She became very depressed and began to lose weight, so her mother decided to take her to Lushan for a complete change of scenery.

Lushan, in Jiangxi Province in the county of Jiujiang, not far from Poyang Lake, is famous for the beauty of its scenery and the wonderful mountain air. It was well known as a spot for patients to recuperate from their illnesses. It used to be (and still is) a retreat for the wealthy, and spotted along the mountainside were many villas owned by Westerners and wealthy Chinese. Both Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong had villas there. Mother called it the Switzerland of China.

At that time, the only way to reach the town at the top of Lushan was by walking or being carried in a sedan chair. Mother told me that she was so thin when they arrived that the sedan chair coolies fought to carry her up the mountain. However, by the time she came back down, she had gained so much weight, no sedan chair coolie wanted to carry her. Mother never said how long she stayed, but she slept and ate well until Father went to bring her home.

Father finished his practical training with Lee & Orange in 1931, at which time he became a qualified engineer, ready to pursue his professional career. The various businesses of the Lee family were looked after by employees, so Father felt that it was not necessary for him to remain in Hong Kong as long as he was close by.

The 1930s were the years when the Chinese Republic needed a great deal of help to build a new country. Like many young Chinese at the time,



Father was filled with hope for the future, and he wanted to do his part. He went to Guangzhou to work in the government of Mayor Liu Jiwan. He occupied different posts over the next few years. He was chief secretary for the city, chief engineer, a member of the Department of Water Works, and also an auditor in the Ministry of Audit.

At the beginning, Mother continued to live on the third floor of the Big House in Hong Kong. The children in the Lee family who were also living in the Big House were Sixth Uncle, Seventh Uncle, Seventh Aunt, Eighth Aunt and cousin Hon Chiu, son of Second Uncle and the eldest grandson in the Lee family.

Cousin Hon Chiu remembers that they were always hungry, not only because the family was cash poor, but also because Grandmother was very frugal. They used to visit Mother on Sundays at teatime and she would bake a cake as a treat for them. By that time, Father had an independent income, and Mother was no longer cash-strapped. Those were memorable times for the children. Mother was the modern and fashionable sister-in-law, and was looked up to by all of Father's siblings. The younger girls who did not have the opportunity to go to England before Grandfather died wanted to have English names, and Mother named them Deanna, Joyce and Amy.

When Father was more settled in his post in the Guangzhou government, Mother moved there. They lived in Dongshan, which was a pleasant residential area in the suburb of Guangzhou. They had by then become good friends with Mayor Liu Jiwan and his family. They socialized a great deal with government officials, and Mother was expected to keep company with their wives.

One day, the ladies went to a fortune-teller, who told the officials' wives that their futures were not rosy, but that Mother's was very good. Mother found that embarrassing, being the wife of the most junior person in the hierarchy of the city government, and the other ladies were not pleased. Of course, at that time, no one foresaw the change of government in China from Nationalist to Communist, when all the Chinese government officials would become refugees.

My parents commuted to Hong Kong every weekend by train, back to the Big House to see Grandmother and the family. By that time, as the Lee family had expanded, many members had moved into the Lee

Building, up the hill from the Big House. My parents stayed in the Big House during their weekend visits.

Since Grandmother was the only person in the family with a motor car, in order for the children to go swimming at South Bay, where the family owned a cabin, all the children would go to the Big House after half-day school on Saturdays to have lunch and wait to see who would take them swimming. It was usually Father or Third Uncle (who had returned from Oxford by then) or Second Aunt. It was a much anticipated outing for the youngsters who enjoyed their afternoon picnic of tea sandwiches at the cabin followed by a swim. Cousin Hon Chiu, who was just learning to swim then and mainly played on the beach, said that Father always treated all of them to ice cream sold by a Dairy Farm<sup>3</sup> vendor after their swim.

During the years my parents commuted between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, they had friends who also made the same return trip each week, so the group usually played bridge during the journey. At this time, Father worked closely with Yuen Menghong, director of public works in Guangzhou. Yuen's cousin, Yuen Yaohong, used to tease Father that, as a foreign graduate, he would know only theory, and not anything about the practical side of building. Yuen Yaohong himself had first started work in construction as a carpenter. However, the two men became good friends, and he became Uncle Yuen to us.

In the mid-1930s, Yuen Yaohong moved to Hong Kong and started to work for the Lee family as the general manager of International Entertainment Enterprises Ltd., the company which leased the Lee Theatre. This company was formed because one of Grandfather's brothers was in the habit of taking money from the till in the theatre, and no employee dared to challenge him. Since he was an elder, Father and his brothers were not in a position to stop him either, even though the theatre belonged to them. With the establishment of International Entertainment Enterprises, the employees could then tell Grandfather's brother that the Lee Theatre was leased by another company, which meant he could no longer help himself to the till. From then on, if he needed money, he had to go to Lee Hysan Estate Co. or to Lee Tung, our rental office.

When my parents' lives became more settled in Guangzhou, they bought a piece of land in Conghua, an area with hot springs, where they

built a small house with open concept on the side of a beautiful hill. The rest of the land was planted as orchards with many different fruit trees. The house, designed by Father, was built in the typical Chinese style with red walls and green tiled roof, with a water tank, fed by the hot springs, placed on the roof. The kitchen was open to the outside. Aside from my parents' bedroom, there were no separate rooms. All their guests slept on *tatamis* on the floor in the living room.

My parents spent many happy days there with their siblings, friends and relatives. They often went swimming in a small lake which had a waterfall at one end. One day, Mother's sister Jenny swam a little too close to the fall and almost drowned. The water in Conghua is well known for its medicinal qualities, and Mother's sister Sarah often brought her son Jay, who was having skin problems, to bathe in the hot springs.<sup>4</sup>

The house in Conghua turned out to be such a wonderful country retreat that Mayor Liu Jiwan and many of the officials of Guangdong Province spent time there as well. Later, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party also built their villas there. The area became a favourite resort for the well-to-do.

After the Second World War, because of political unrest in China, my parents had no plans to use it any more, so they asked the caretaker who had been looking after the house and the grounds to move into the house. I met the caretaker when he came to Hong Kong at the end of the 1940s to report on the condition of the property to Father; Father asked him in particular how the fruit trees were doing.

I did not see this house myself until the late 1980s, when my husband, Neville, and I went to Conghua with Mother and her friend Daisy Li. The garden was completely overgrown with weeds, and it was difficult to distinguish the trees. The house was altered and in a terrible state of disrepair. Mother was greatly disappointed to see it painted white instead of the original red and green. A nondescript house had been built close to it, and a public dining hall was located in the area where they and their guests parked their cars. It saddened Mother to see the property in that condition.

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In 1934, Father left his employment with the Guangzhou government to do something very different on Hainan Island, a tropical island that is part of China. Situated between the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin, Hainan is about the same size as the island of Taiwan. Except for the Paracel Islands, where troops were stationed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, Hainan Island is the southern-most territory of China.

Why did an Oxford graduate take his young wife to a backward place like Hainan Island? I never thought to ask Father, but I guess he had a sense of curiosity and of adventure. After all, he was an inquisitive person. I think the main reason was his desire to help China, by working in a remote and backward place. He believed that one person could make a difference even in a country with a population of hundreds of millions.

Hainan Island was just beginning to attract the attention of the Chinese government in the 1930s. Minister T.V. Soong visited the island and expressed the opinion that it should be developed. Industrialists and educators began to realize the economic importance of the area known as the “larder of China,” where rice crops can be harvested up to three times a year. It was also known as “the paradise of China” because flowers bloom year round and delicious fruits and magnificent trees grow everywhere.

Ancient Indian writers referred to Hainan as “the Island of Palms” because at least six types of palm grow profusely there, producing considerable income. On this tropical island, the sun is so intense during the day that people cannot go out without hats or umbrellas. The humidity is usually high. In summer, the temperature rises as high as 98°F (37°C) and in winter, falls to 45°F (7°C). However, along Limu Ling, the mountain range that runs through the middle of the island, the temperature is always cool.

Hainan became known to the Chinese at the time of the first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi (245–210 B.C.E.). The island, inhabited by aborigines known as the Li tribe, attracted about twenty-three thousand Chinese colonists from the mainland during the Early Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–24 C.E.). By the end of the Later Han Dynasty (25–219 C.E.), the entire island was subjugated and the Li tribes were pushed into the centre of the island. The name Hainan, meaning “south of the sea,” came from the Yuan Dynasty.

In 1921, the island officially became part of Guangdong Province. By the late 1920s, there were already more than two million Chinese living there. Chinese settlements were founded along the northern part of the island, where close contact could be maintained with the mainland. Haikou, the major city, was located at the northern tip of the island; it was not only the home of the governor but also the headquarters of the garrison commander.<sup>5</sup>

Hainan Island was known as Qiongya Province to the Chinese government. In the 1920s, the Chinese government started to build highways in order to open up the island for development. Besides shops, restaurants, hotels and banks that catered to the population, there were some Chinese investments, mainly in rubber and sugar cane plantations. Some of these companies were later abandoned because of problems with bandits in the area.<sup>6</sup> In the 1930s, it was divided into thirteen counties, two of which were exclusively inhabited by Chinese. The Li tribe and the Chinese lived in separate communities even if they were geographically in the same areas.<sup>7</sup>

Since Father wanted to help open up a primitive part of China for agriculture and trade, he and Mother moved to Hainan to work as pioneers in ranching, with the idea of selling cattle to Europe. The weather and the topography in parts of Hainan are known to be good for cattle farming.<sup>8</sup> Father bought land "as far as the eye can see," according to the description in his land deed, and imported the best cattle from Europe for breeding.

Being adventurous, Father crossed the island through the Limu Ling mountains to the area known as the Li Country, where the aborigines lived.<sup>9</sup> He was warned by the local Chinese not to go into the interior because of the danger of malaria and other diseases; it was believed that nine out of ten people who went in did not come out alive. Father, however, had faith in modern science, and believed that as long as he had quinine and other medicines with him, he would be all right. And he was.

While in Hainan, Father also became a plantation owner, growing flax and sugar cane. In 1936, together with other investors, he bought Bao Cheng Company. Bao Cheng, which had been established in 1928 by two partners, owned five thousand acres where flax was grown as a cash crop. The cost to produce a ton of processed flax was seven pounds sterling,



but it could fetch thirty pounds in the London market. It was a profitable business, but again, because of bandits in the area, the company closed sometime in 1930–31.<sup>10</sup>

After Father's group bought the company, he renamed it Lee Hing Plantation Company, and later changed the name to Lee Hing Agricultural Company Ltd. The company was situated on the north coast of Hainan near Ling Gao County (west of Haikou). The size of the farm was increased to fifteen thousand acres, growing flax and sugar cane. By January 1937, more land was purchased, and the size was increased to twenty thousand acres. The company was well established with its own flax-processing machines and storage buildings, forty-five horsepower generators, gasoline storage, a garage for cars, an office building and residences for workers.<sup>11</sup>

After they were settled, my parents brought Second Uncle with them, as well as a young man named Leung Kwong Wing, who continued to be in the employ of the Lee family all his life, eventually becoming one of our gardeners in the Big House. Men from the Li tribe were hired to clear the land and look after the cattle. Father had firearms for hunting, and perhaps also for protection against bandits, but issued strict instructions that guns not be given to or even handled by the Li tribe. One day, he was beside himself when he found out that Second Uncle had used some of the guns for bartering with the aborigines.

Father used to say that, because Hainan Island was so far out of the way, one could always come across something unusual on the island and in its waters. One day, while my parents were at the coast, a fishing boat came back to shore dragging a grouper ten feet long. There was great astonishment because no one had ever seen a grouper that large before. The entire village, my parents and their entourage included, celebrated with a meal from that one fish. As children, we were very impressed by this story.

Father often went hunting for wild boars. It was a dangerous sport because the boars, if wounded, would charge at the hunter. Sometimes Mother would go along, riding a small horse. She was not a good rider, and was frightened whenever the horse jumped at the sound of gunfire. However, riding was necessary because it was the only way to get around in the interior.



My parents lived like pioneers, hunting and growing their own food. Since there was no electricity, Father built his own generators using wind power.<sup>12</sup> My parents made friends there, mostly with other pioneers and missionaries, and with some of the local village headmen. They would sometimes go into town, stay in small hotels and meet their friends, and at times they took visitors to various parts of the island. They both loved living there. Tanned by the strong tropical sun, Father became almost as dark as the Li people.

Father told us stories about the people of the Li tribe who were reputed to have short tails which was never confirmed. He traded glass beads and soap with them for gold nuggets. Apparently there were gold nuggets in the river beds in the mountainous areas in the centre of the island.

Father often talked about Hainan Island with nostalgia, because it was a treasured part of his life that could never be repeated. The best souvenirs he had from Hainan were mango forks and knives which he had designed and crafted there, and which my family still use and treasure.

By 1937, important events were happening elsewhere. On July 7, 1937, Japanese and Chinese troops collided at the Marco Polo Bridge in the Lugouqiao region near Beijing. It was the beginning of the undeclared Sino-Japanese war. Father felt it was time for him to go back to mainland China to help. Mother told me, "Even if China had not been at war, when the war broke out in Europe in 1939, it would not have been possible to ship cattle or agricultural products there anyway."

At the end of 1937, my parents moved back to Hong Kong, and Father again commuted to China, this time to help the Nationalist government. Mother began to feel unwell, and a visit to the doctor confirmed that she was pregnant. In February 1938, ten years after their wedding, my eldest brother, Richard, was born, and a year later, in October, Mother gave birth to my older sister, Deanna.

Father thought the return to Hong Kong was just an interruption from his life in Hainan. He had left the plantations in the care of others, not realizing that future events would prevent him from going back, and that eventually all his land would be repossessed by the Chinese government. Although Mother told me that the land deed was kept in her safe deposit box, we could not find it after she passed away.

During the 1930s, the central Chinese government under Chiang Kaishek enjoyed the support of many well-educated, highly qualified persons with high ideals.<sup>13</sup> With the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the subsequent Marco Polo Bridge incident in 1937, China's problems became urgent. In Hong Kong, a group of brilliant engineers gathered to discuss the rebuilding of China after the war, and in 1938, the Chinese Institute of Engineers (CIE), Hong Kong Chapter, was established. The membership was restricted to qualified engineers who had more than seven years of practical experience. The first president was Huang Boqiao,<sup>14</sup> who was director of the Jinghu Railroad Bureau, and Father was the vice-president. A young man named Ching Tong (C.T.) Wu was hired as secretary for the institute, and that was how he and Father first met.<sup>15</sup> He became a lifelong friend and confidant, and an important source for this book.

In 1940, Father was elected president of the CIE (Hong Kong Chapter). Dinners for the institute were always held at the Big House. His connections in Hong Kong made it possible for him to arrange visits for the engineers to various companies and factories, because he was trusted not to allow any stealing of trade secrets.<sup>16</sup>

In 1938, Japan invaded South China, and in October, Guangzhou was occupied by the Japanese. Father commuted between mainland China and Hong Kong frequently during the years before the fall of Hong Kong. He was involved not only as an engineer, but also in many other aspects in the war effort against the Japanese. He was an advisor and the purchasing manager for the China Tea Company, which was one of the most important branches under the Finance Ministry of the Chinese central government. A large proportion of the country's foreign exchange income came from the sale of tea.<sup>17</sup>

In later years, Mother explained to me the importance of selling Chinese tea for foreign exchange in order to buy equipment for the defence of China against the Japanese invasion. The head office of the China Tea Company was in Chongqing, and Father frequently commuted between there and Hong Kong.

Father was also asked by the Chinese government to look after the distribution of sea salt.<sup>18</sup> In certain parts of the interior of China, the local population lacked iodine in their diet and goitre was prevalent. It was,

therefore, important to make sea salt available to them. I remember the adults talking about this problem during the war, and in the interior of China, we saw people suffering from the disease.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank took over the mortgages turned out to be a blessing. When Hong Kong surrendered to the Japanese in 1941, there was complete chaos in the city. Our entire family went into China for the duration of the war, taking only what we could carry. Many of the deeds of our properties would have been lost during the looting if they had not been in the safe-keeping of the bank. Interview with J.S. Lee.

<sup>2</sup> A photograph of Father supervising the workers was taken in 1931. Interview with George Todkill, who used to work for Whampoa Dockyard, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Josephine Chiu and Jenny Hoo, Vancouver, April 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Chungshee H. Liu, *Hainan, The Island and the People* (Shanghai, 1939).

<sup>6</sup> Wang Shaoping, *Feidao Qiongya Yinxiang Ji* (Philippines and Hainan Impressions) (Hong Kong, 1939), p. 81. Wang was one of the investors in Father's company.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> The Li aborigines physically and culturally resemble the Tai people who lived in Thailand, Burma, Yunnan Province in China and Indo-China. They are stout, of medium stature, with yellowish-brown skin, straight black hair and dark brown eyes. Their facial features are quite different from those of the Chinese. (For centuries, Chinese scholars referred to them as the tattooed race of the south who knew no civilization.) The women are tattooed (in a practice known as *tantan*), apparently to make it easier to identify their own descendants. They have their own native costumes, but in the summer, the adult males usually wear only loin cloths and turbans. In the 1930s, they lived on hunting and farming.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Shaoping, *Feidao*, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with He Mingsi, former secretary of the Xinhua News Agency, who often accompanied my parents during their travels in China, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>13</sup> These included names such as Shen Yi, who was chairman of the Technology Department of the Chinese Resources Committee (CRC) and minister of the Communications Bureau; Qian Changzhou, vice-chairman of the CRC; and

Jiang Pingbo, purchasing manager of the CRC. Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>14</sup> He was well known for establishing precision for train schedules by using Omega equipment and was highly respected by Chiang Kaishek.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995. As the secretary of the Chinese Institute of Engineers, C.T. Wu made thirty dollars a month. Father took a liking to him and promised to find him a higher-paying job. At the beginning of 1941, Father called up his friend, Zhu Baiying, who was head of the research department of the China Tea Company, to recommend that he hire C.T. Wu. Even as a clerk, Wu's salary tripled. Wu's mother declared that he could get married since he was making so much money.

<sup>16</sup> An example of this trust was the Tian Chu Weijing factory (The Heavenly Kitchen Monosodium Glutamate Factory), owned by Wu Yunchu. At that time, monosodium glutamate was mostly manufactured in Japan. Under normal circumstances, Wu would never allow visitors to his factory, but Father was able to organize a tour for the engineers.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Spring 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Phone interview with Sir Jack Cater in Hong Kong, June 1997.

## CHAPTER 13

### **Storm Clouds Gather: Hong Kong Falls to the Japanese**

**B**etween 1937 and 1941, while Father was involved with helping China in the war effort, Mother gave birth to three children – my brother, my sister and me.

Because of the Japanese invasion of China, refugees flooded into Hong Kong; consequently, the population of the colony increased from 700,000 to 1.6 million. Horrible tales of massacre, rape and starvation circulated in the colony. The British government did not really want to believe that Japan would invade Hong Kong and, to play it safe, tried to placate the Japanese government in the hope of avoiding war, so the more virulent anti-Japanese literature in Hong Kong was censored by the colonial government.<sup>1</sup>

The British government misjudged the importance of Hong Kong to Japan as a centre for the movement of troops and war materials, and as a base for its navy. British military intelligence ignored the Japanese troop exercises across the Chinese border after their occupation of Guangzhou, and was ignorant of the Japanese spies who infiltrated Hong Kong.

Under the command of Major-General Takeo Ito, Japanese intelligence officers worked in Hong Kong as bartenders, barbers, masseurs and waiters in establishments frequented by the British military, offering cold beers, exotic food, accommodating women and generous credit facilities, and listening to their conversations. In fact, the best men's hairdresser in Hong Kong, who, over a seven-year period, cut the hair of two successive governors, several generals, the commissioner of police, the officer in charge of Special Branch and the chairman of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, presented himself to his employer after the capitulation of Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941, in the uniform of a Commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of Guangzhou in October 1938, the Japanese amassed troops north of the Hong Kong border. The 38th Army was training daily



at Baiyunshan in Guangzhou, which had the same topography as the area at Gin Drinker's Line, in the New Territories. Nightly, they prepared for a border attack on Hong Kong from Shenzhen.<sup>3</sup>

In 1939, while the Second World War was raging in Europe, the War Office in London was well aware of the military deficiencies in Hong Kong, but the colony was regarded as expendable and, in fact, militarily indefensible. When Lord Hastings Ismay, Prime Minister Winston Churchill's chief of staff, proposed at a War Office conference to demilitarize Hong Kong, he was accused of being a defeatist. Sir Geoffrey Northcote, governor of Hong Kong, believed that Lord Ismay was a realist and wrote to Whitehall in October 1940 to urge the withdrawal of the British garrison "in order to avoid the slaughter of civilians and the destruction of property that would follow a Japanese attack."<sup>4</sup> No one listened. Besides, Northcote was about to retire due to ill health, and was soon to be replaced by Sir Mark Young.

Both Whitehall and many Hong Kong residents wanted to believe Major-General Edward Grasett, the Toronto-born commander of the British troops in China, who maintained that the Japanese would not declare war on the British or the Americans. However, he still felt that the garrison in Hong Kong should be reinforced, but his request was denied by the War Office. In 1941, Air Chief Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, commander-in-chief of the Far East, believing that Hong Kong could endure a siege of six months or more, requested an increase in the garrison. His request too was denied because Churchill believed that there was not the slightest chance of holding Hong Kong.

In the meantime, Major-General Grasett continued to campaign for reinforcements even after he knew of Churchill's decision. When he retired from the China command in July 1941, he stopped off in Ottawa en route to England, where he met with Canada's chief of general staff, H.D.G. (Harry) Crerar, his old schoolmate. They discussed how long Hong Kong could withstand an extended siege if it had an addition of one or two battalions. He did not suggest to Crerar that Canada should supply the manpower, but he did make that proposal to the British chiefs of staff.<sup>5</sup> The defence of Hong Kong was dealt with half-heartedly. The only RAF squadron was diverted to Malaya, leaving five obsolete fighters as Hong Kong's air defence. Sea defence depended on the H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and the H.M.S. *Repulse*, which were supposed to come from the South



Seas to relieve Hong Kong when necessary. It was also assumed that the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor would be able to contain the Japanese in the event of a major conflict.<sup>6</sup> On land, the defence of the colony depended entirely on a garrison of 11,000 regular British and Indian troops, and a citizen force of 1,387 Hong Kong Volunteers. Batteries were put on the island of Hong Kong at the entrances to the harbour. Gin Drinker's Line was to be the first line of defence. Tunnels and bomb shelters were built all over the city in preparation for an attack. In November 1941, the garrison was reinforced by two battalions from Canada, the Royal Rifles and the Winnipeg Grenadiers.

The population of Hong Kong did have drills in case of a bombing attack, and students in middle schools were given uniforms and trained as air raid wardens.<sup>7</sup> As the news became more alarming, black-out practices became more frequent. Young men were asked to join the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps. Among them was Bill Poy, who was married to Mother's cousin, Ethel Lam, and who later became my father-in-law. However, the reality of war was not taken too seriously, because, as Poy told me, it was considered "fun for young men to be with their friends in a motorcycle squadron." Some actually joined because they would be given a motorcycle.<sup>8</sup> At the time, Poy owned his own motorcycle on which he used to take my future husband, Neville, to school at Ling Ying, at the top of the Lee Gardens. Poy, an Australian-born Chinese, was working for the Canadian Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong.

No one wanted to believe that Hong Kong would be attacked, even with the appearance of many refugees in the colony. Overnight, Hong Kong had become the cultural capital of the Chinese world because of the arrival of refugee artists, scholars and writers. The economy boomed when the population tripled, and a thriving smuggling trade with inland China, across Japanese-controlled territories, was making some people very rich. Manufacturing in the colony flourished. In the midst of all this, I was born in May 1941.

In July 1941, all Japanese assets in Hong Kong were frozen, following similar action in Britain and the United States. However, Britain still did not believe Japan would invade Hong Kong, and Japanese nationals in the colony were not kept under close surveillance. When Colonel Suzuki, a Japanese intelligence officer, was exposed by a British agent, the Foreign Office did not expel him from Hong Kong because Britain and

Japan were not at war. When he departed of his own accord at the end of November, barely two weeks before Japan attacked Hong Kong, he had with him the complete details of the British defence plan.

On September 19, 1941, the Dominions Office in London dispatched a secret telegram to William Lyon Mackenzie King's government, asking Canada to provide one or two battalions for the defence of Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> On November 19, the population of Hong Kong welcomed the arrival of the two Canadian battalions. However, no one knew that the troops had little battle training and no knowledge of the colony or of local transportation.

Life in our family went on as usual. No one considered leaving the colony since conditions in China were much worse, of course, with the exception of my father. It was at this time that Father met Liao Chengzhi,<sup>10</sup> secretary of the South China Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, and they became good friends. Liao was engaged in resistance activities in Guangdong and Hong Kong until the fall of Guangzhou in 1938, when he escaped to Hong Kong. There, he organized forces to send to Huipo, which became the progenitor of the East River Detachment, an anti-Japanese guerrilla force in South China and Hong Kong.

Father and Liao tried to negotiate with the British government to provide ammunition for the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade guerrillas to help defend the island against the Japanese, but the talks failed because the British did not want ammunitions to fall into the hands of the pro-Communist guerrillas.<sup>11</sup> (At that time, the different guerrilla brigades in China worked together with the Nationalist government for the sole purpose of defeating the Japanese.) The two men, along with an English friend, planned the sabotage of the electric plant in expectation of a Japanese invasion, but the Japanese attack took everyone by surprise.<sup>12</sup>

The one thing the Lee family did in preparation for a Japanese attack was to stockpile rice in the Big House. Some people in the Wan Chai district knew of our rice reserve, and this resulted in looting during and after the Japanese invasion.

On the evening of December 6, 1941, Governor Sir Mark Young attended a charity ball at the Peninsula Hotel. The following day, Sunday, at midday, a mobilization call went out and a state of emergency was announced over the radio. Many who heard it thought it was just another

preparedness test. Bill Poy reported for duty, but many volunteers did not when they realized that there was real danger of war. Poy and Willy Eu, the son of Eu Tongsan, a very wealthy merchant in Hong Kong, reported to Kowloon Railway Station because they were dispatch riders attached to the Field Engineers, who were mobilizing to blow up roads and bridges in the New Territories in predetermined areas in case of an invasion.

That Sunday, Mother's youngest sister, Jenny, was preparing for her wedding to take place the following day. She and her husband were to sign the register in the City Hall in Hong Kong, and the wedding and reception were to take place in Kowloon.

At eight-thirty on Monday morning, December 8, my future husband, Neville, who was in Grade One at the time, did not go to school because all schools were closed. He went to the rooftop with one of his family's servants to take down the dry laundry from the laundry lines, and they saw many airplanes in the sky. Just as someone said, "It's only another practice," bombs started falling on the urban area of Kowloon and on Kai Tak Airport.

My Aunt Jenny and her future husband had just crossed the harbour to Hong Kong to the City Hall to register for their wedding, and the bombing prevented them from returning to Kowloon for the ceremony. Until her husband's death, Aunt Jenny wondered whether their marriage was legal since there were no witnesses and the ceremony never took place.

Grandparents Wong were living in Shouson Hill Road in Aberdeen at that time, next door to their good friend, Sir Shou Son Chau. The British military commandeered their house because it was in a strategic position, and they were told to leave within four hours. With no time to pack anything, they came to stay with us.

Within minutes, the bombs on Kai Tak destroyed the five old fighter planes. Within a few hours, the people of Hong Kong heard about the destruction by the Japanese of the U.S. Fleet in Pearl Harbor, the first bombs on Manila and Singapore, and the sinking of the H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and H.M.S. *Repulse*.<sup>13</sup>

The Big House was hit by shrapnel, and a bomb created a huge hole on one side of the Lee Building. We were very easy targets because we were so high up on the hill. Members of the Lee family gathered their essentials and moved to the backstage area of the Lee Theatre. We were

grateful to Grandfather for building the theatre as strong as a fortress; little did he know that his descendants would use it in times of war.

The entire Lee family, along with my Wong grandparents, moved into the rooms behind the backstage of the Lee Theatre which happened to have a kitchen. We were crowded, but safe. As we were not able to bring enough rice, we had to make do with *congee* (rice gruel). The older children were given fried crispy rice to ease their hunger between meals. As a seven-month-old baby, I immediately started getting sick and could not drink the powdered milk my mother brought along. Mother blamed it on the lack of clean water, because we used well water at the Lee Theatre. From then on, and until the end of the war, I suffered from poor health.

On the morning of December 8, at the Queen Mary Hospital, Joseph Tam was a nurse in training on his early morning shift that started at six o'clock. The moment the bombs started to drop, all patients were discharged to make room for war casualties. Those who still needed care were transferred to St. Stephen's Girls' College, which was converted into a relief hospital with camp beds set up for the patients. By afternoon, many injured soldiers were brought in. Tam had to look after twenty-four patients, most of whom were Canadians.<sup>14</sup> The doctors' offices and the nursing school at the Queen Mary Hospital were converted into dormitories, and some government officials moved in, among them Governor Sir Mark Young.

On December 10, at three o'clock in the morning, there was a loud banging on the door of villager Chung Poon's house in Wong Chuk Shan in the New Territories. Thinking that it might be bandits, he approached the door with a knife in his hand. He opened the door to find several guns pointing at him. For Chung and the rest of the population in Sai Kung (New Territories), the occupation had begun. Two days earlier, the Japanese army had overrun Tai Po and Shatin, and the day before, had taken Shingmun Redoubt, which was part of Gin Drinker's Line. British forces were withdrawing from the New Territories to the island of Hong Kong, and a contingent of Sepoy soldiers was covering the retreat at Devil's Peak. The Japanese soldiers had come over from Shap Sze Heung, intending to find their way to Kowloon, and had probably strayed into the village of Wong Chuk Shan by mistake. The soldiers were knocking at every door to force villagers to act as their porters. On December 11, the Japanese cavalry passed the Sai Kung Market. There was no disturbance



or fighting, since the police had been withdrawn before the Japanese arrived. The villagers just stayed indoors.<sup>15</sup>

The British defensive positions in the New Territories and Kowloon had been prepared with a view to a delaying action that would allow consolidation on the island of Hong Kong. However, within forty-eight hours, the Japanese had broken this defence line, capturing the Jubilee Redoubt at Shing Mun Dam. (Jubilee Redoubt on Gin Drinker's Line overlooked the Shing Mun Dam of the Jubilee Reservoir, just north of the range of hills separating Kowloon from the New Territories.) The garrisons retreated to the island of Hong Kong. The Japanese fired mortars at the British defences, but there was no bombing.

By December 12, the Japanese had taken control of Kowloon and artillery was stationed along the waterfront facing Hong Kong. Mother's younger sister Josephine's home in Tsim Sha Tsui was commandeered by the Japanese for that purpose.

At nine o'clock the next morning, a Japanese staff officer crossed to Victoria Pier in a launch bearing a flag of truce, and presented to Governor Mark Young a demand for the surrender of the colony, under threat of heavy artillery and bombardment from the air. The governor rejected the demand and the blitz began.

During the period of fighting, whenever there was an air-raid signal, everyone would go to the bomb shelters. The one near the Lee Theatre was at Leighton Road. During one of the bombing raids, Grandfather Wong did not enter the shelter fast enough and was hit on his shoulders by shrapnel.

During the night of December 18, the Japanese landed at three different points on the island — North Point, Braemar Point and Shau Kei Wan — cutting the island into eastern and western halves. The Japanese who landed in North Point took over the electrical generating station which was guarded by civilian volunteers, a group of older men, all of whom were killed.<sup>16</sup> The Japanese troops crossed the island, and there was a great deal of fighting towards Repulse Bay and Stanley. Bill Poy saw a Canadian soldier killed in a bunker in Wong Nai Chung Gap while he was delivering messages between Headquarters and the troops. On December 21, the governor was given further instructions from Churchill that "there must be no thought of surrender."<sup>17</sup>

Father was in Chongqing, China, when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. He immediately flew back on one of the China Tea Company planes and had actually reached Hong Kong air space, but the plane could not land. It was diverted to Huizhou. It was fortunate for Father, as he used to tell us, for if he had been there and had been captured by the Japanese troops, he would have been executed immediately because of his involvement in the resistance.

By Christmas Eve, the British and Canadian troops had retreated to the Peak because they believed the Japanese had taken over the Gap. Bill Poy was sent to take a look, but did not see anyone, so the troops moved back into the Gap. By then, news had come to the troops that negotiations were in progress with the Japanese, who by now had occupied half of the island. They had not yet moved into the city of Victoria.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Xie Yongguang, *Xianggang Kangri Fengyun Lu* (Hong Kong, 1995), pp. 72-73.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Carew, *The Fall of Hong Kong* (London, 1960), pp. 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Xie Yongguang, *Xianggang Kangri Fengyun Lu*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Ted Ferguson, *Desperate Siege: The Battle of Hong Kong* (Toronto, 1980), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints: The Memoirs of Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke* (Hong Kong, 1975), p.58.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Jeanne Tam, who was then known as Tsui Ling Fai. She was one of the air-raid wardens. Toronto, January 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, *Desperate Siege*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Son of Liao Zhongkai, leader of the left-wing Nationalist party.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, former director of the Xinhua News Agency (New China News Agency, or NCNA), Hong Kong branch, Guangzhou, November 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with He Mingsi, former secretary of the Xinhua News Agency, Hong Kong Branch, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.



<sup>15</sup> David Faure, coordinator, and the members of the Oral History Project Team, Centre for East Asian Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, "Saikung, The Making of the District and its Experience During World War II," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Asiatic Society*, 22 (1982): 184-85.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, p. 65.

## CHAPTER 14

### Occupation of Hong Kong

**O**n Christmas Day 1941, at six-thirty in the evening, Governor Sir Mark Young surrendered to the Japanese. He was removed to the Peninsula Hotel (used as Japanese headquarters during occupation), and subsequently to Taiwan and then to Mukden (both under Japanese rule at the time). The survivors of the garrison and the non-Chinese members of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps were sent to POW camps — North Point, Shum Shui Po, Argyle Street and Ma Tao Chung. Many of the POWs were later shipped to labour camps in Japan and other Japanese-occupied territories. The Chinese Hong Kong Volunteers were given permission to take off their uniforms and return home. The internment of civilians classified as enemies at Stanley camp was a slower process, and they remained there until the end of the war. There were many stories of heroism, treachery, great suffering and survival during these times.

When Bill Poy heard of the surrender, and before orders were given, he asked the senior officer what they, the Volunteers, were supposed to do, and he was told to wait for instructions from the Japanese. Poy said, "I'm not going to wait, I must join my wife and children." He then turned to Willy Eu and said, "Let's go!" They went to the Portuguese Volunteers Unit, gave in their revolvers and left their motorcycles. They changed out of their uniforms into Chinese clothes which they always carried with them, just in case, and walked to Eu Yan Sang, a Chinese medicine shop owned by Willy's father, Eu Tongsan. From there, they phoned Willy's mother at Euston on Bonham Road, one of the Eu castle-style homes in Hong Kong. She told them everything was all right, and that the Japanese had allowed them to stay. That night, Poy and Eu could hear the Japanese troops moving in and cordoning off the city.

The next day, Poy and Eu decided to go up to Euston, but when they looked out of the medicine shop, they saw a Japanese sentry posted almost outside the door. In order to look as casual as possible, they went

outside, chewing on Chinese dried plums. The next thing Poy knew, he was hit on the head; he didn't know that he had to bow to all Japanese soldiers. They made their way to Euston bowing all the way.

The rest of the Poy family was at home in Happy Valley. Neville was very sad that, because of the lack of food, they had to let Snow White, their Borzoi (Russian wolfhound), go. It was probably caught and eaten the moment it was let out of their sight.

For a period there was total chaos, because the Japanese soldiers, some of whom were Taiwanese, were given a free hand to rob, rape and murder. The soldiers went from house to house looking for "flower maidens," and young women hid wherever they could. They put mud and ashes on their faces and wore tattered clothes to avoid being raped. As in all wars, there was tremendous suffering. Some were luckier than others. The entire population was gripped with fear.

The following day, the cook at Euston returned home late and was scolded by Willy Eu's mother. He said the Japanese had stopped him to do some work for them and had given him a card with which he could go anywhere. The next day, Bill Poy borrowed the card which gave the name and the age of the cook, who happened to be approximately the same age as himself. He used it to pass all the sentries to get to Blue Pool Road in Happy Valley where his family was. When he arrived, he found out that there had been rapes and atrocities in their apartment building. A few people were killed, and Tang Siu Kin of the Kowloon Bus Company, a well-known personality in Hong Kong, had been stabbed many times by Japanese soldiers. Tang had gone there because a fortune-teller had told him that it would be a safe place to be!

Fortunately, when the Japanese soldiers came, Ethel Poy had her mother with her. She hid in the cupboard with blankets over her, while her mother took Neville and his sister, Adrienne, and sat on the floor in front of the cupboard. Her mother told the soldiers that they were alone. It was a very close call. After the Japanese soldiers left, Ethel and her mother took the children to join Ethel's brother David and his wife, Connie, downtown. The servants in the apartment told Bill Poy where they had gone.

After he found his family, Poy told his wife that he had to return to their apartment, to retrieve three diamonds which he had hidden in one of

the legs of their sideboard. He used the cook's ID card again. On his way, he was stopped by a sentry, but he was able to explain, with his few words of Japanese learnt as a youth in Manchuria, that he needed to go home to fetch clothes for his children. As he was approaching their apartment, he saw their dining table on the street for sale.

When he entered the apartment with a Japanese sentry, he saw clothes strewn everywhere, some of which had been used as toilet paper. The sideboard was still there, but he had to get rid of the sentry. Fortunately, the sentry was called away for a few minutes, and Poy got the diamonds out just in time before he returned. "You've never seen anyone working so fast with a screwdriver!" Poy told me. The sentry then asked him, "Are you twenty-six?" That was the age on the ID card. If the question had been, "How old are you?" he would have been in grave trouble because he had forgotten to check the cook's age on the card.

Bill Poy returned to his family downtown. He wanted to take them up to Euston, but by then it was dark and there was a curfew. Ethel said, "You go and return with help tomorrow morning." The next morning Bill and one of the Eu's servants found the apartment empty. The walls were covered with bullet holes and smeared with blood. His neighbours told him his wife and children were hiding under the stairwell. He found Neville holding a flask, and Ethel had Adrienne on her back, with biscuits in her hands. Ethel's mother, David and Connie had already left, but Ethel and her children had waited for Bill.

Apparently, after Bill left, Japanese soldiers had come to the building to look for young women. Using the same trick again, Ethel's mother put Ethel and Connie in the cupboard and put a blanket over them. She and David put a mattress on the floor, and lay down with Neville and Adrienne, in front of the cupboard. Two Japanese soldiers came into their apartment with flashlights (there was no electricity), but fortunately, just in the nick of time, the Kempeitai (Japanese Military Police) came in and told the soldiers to leave.

With the servant carrying Adrienne, Bill, Ethel and Neville walked to Wan Chai, where they saw a big street parade with Japanese on white horses, and soldiers carrying their dead comrades in boxes. They passed a small family restaurant and went in to get something to eat. They bought a chicken for one hundred dollars, and ate it while waiting for the parade

to pass. They then headed to Euston, where there was no sign of war, and there was food. When Neville went to bed that night, he asked if he could stay there forever.<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese army took over the Queen Mary Hospital, and everyone was told to leave except the mechanic, Ah Law, who was needed to operate the hospital steam room and the big stove. Everything, including all the medicine, was discarded and replaced by shipments from Japan. After some months, Ah Law was also dismissed.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the staff of the Queen Mary Hospital served in the relief hospital that had been set up at St. Stephen's Girls' College. St. Stephen's remained a hospital for close to five years, admitting only Chinese Hong Kong citizens. A small classroom was converted for minor surgery and dressings. There were Chinese and Irish doctors, such as Dr. G.E. Griffiths, Dr. K.D. Ling and Dr. Raymond Lee. Most of the British nursing sisters and the doctors were, by then, interned, with the exception of Dr. Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke,<sup>3</sup> who continued to serve as director of medical services. In that capacity, he was able to help many of the citizens of Hong Kong during the occupation. Joseph Tam and other medical staff were given notes by Dr. Selwyn-Clarke so that they would get employment with the British, should they get to Free China.<sup>4</sup>

The Hong Kong-based research department of the China Tea Company was closed. The Chinese Finance Ministry gave instructions that the money in the company in Hong Kong was to be distributed to all the employees, and each received the equivalent of four months' salary. C.T. Wu volunteered to help withdraw the money from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank for the company, and in the distribution of the cash, took his share in ten-dollar bills, because he felt they would be much more acceptable than the larger bills in times of war. He was right, because later on, the Japanese banned the use of notes larger than ten dollars. With this money he went into China as a refugee.

Two days after the Poyes arrived in Euston, Bill Poy went downtown to Pedder Street. He passed a French jewellery shop that he sometimes visited with Eu Tongsan, Willy's father. The shop was flying a Vichy flag (a sign of neutrality). Poy had an idea. He knew the Japanese wanted watches and so he asked the owner, Mr. Walsh, if he would trust him to sell some watches to the Japanese for him. Mr. Walsh gave him ten of



the ones that were more difficult to sell, and a couple of the lower line of Rolex. Poy went straight to the headquarters of the Kempeitai where he saw sacks of flour and rice, as well as cigarettes and whisky. When the sergeant in charge asked how much the Rolex was, Poy told him, "For you, it's free." The sergeant then offered Poy goods from the station, and Poy asked for a sack of flour, cigarettes, whisky and some rice. The sergeant not only gave these items to him, but had them delivered to Euston. However, the flour was found to be full of weevils. When Poy told the sergeant, he asked Poy if he could sell the remaining sacks of flour for him. Poy went to a Chinese friend who in turn sold these to the Japanese. For each sack, the sergeant got forty yen and Poy kept sixty yen. From then on, if the Japanese wanted to buy anything, Poy would go and look for them. At that time, one Japanese yen was equivalent to two Hong Kong dollars, and it was useful to have some Japanese money.

By hanging around the Kempeitai headquarters, Poy was able to help his friends get supplies such as rice and flour. Within a short time, he became friendly with more members of the Kempeitai, who visited them in Euston and sometimes brought rice. Since the Kempeitai had control of Hong Kong, the family did not suffer. Neville, only six then, remembers that the sergeant of the Kempeitai was very nice to him and Adrienne, who was three. Neville, being musical, was often asked to perform for the Japanese when they visited them. However, to his parents' great concern, he liked to sing "Qi Lai," a Chinese revolutionary song that schoolchildren used to sing at assembly in school every morning, and to play "Colonel Bogey" on the piano. His parents had to stop him whenever he wanted to perform these pieces when the Kempeitai were around. For the rest of her life, his mother never lost her fear of or dislike for the Japanese.

Japan not only needed Hong Kong as a naval base, but also considered it as a source of income and material wealth. Anything that could be of use in Japan was confiscated, including cars, building materials and machinery, and shipped to Japan. The Japanese helped themselves to whatever they liked. Aunt Jenny's family car was taken, but they were fortunate that the soldiers gave them a bag of rice in exchange. The soldiers even took their pet monkey. Hong Kong harbour was filled with heavily-loaded outgoing cargo ships. Few armaments left by the British were taken by the Japanese because the guerrillas as well as the local



population got there first. Some of these were smuggled into China. Between December 10 and December 31, 1941, there was a thriving market of British armaments in the Kowloon City area. The buyers were Hong Kong people and Sai Kung villagers, as well as the guerrillas.

After Hong Kong surrendered, the Lee family members left the Lee Theatre and went home. Mother and the three of us went to live in the Lee Building with many other members of the family. The Big House had been looted and there were many dead bodies lying around because the Japanese soldiers shot looters on sight. It was a very difficult time for Mother, being so young and with three small children. What she did not know was that she was looked after by “agents” sent by Father, since he could not be there himself.

The “agents” were Chinese guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers. Few westerners in Hong Kong knew that Chinese guerrillas and agents of various political factions had been infiltrating into the New Territories since 1938. There were official guerrillas who were paid and armed by the Nationalist government under Chiang Kaishek. However, the most active guerrilla group in Hong Kong after the British surrender on Christmas Day 1941 was that of the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade, a subdivision of the East River Detachment, the foundation of which was laid by Liao Chengzhi in Hong Kong after the fall of Guangzhou. (The detachment went officially under the Communist banner in December 1943, when the name changed to the Guangdong People’s Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Corps.)

The Chinese guerrillas in the colony had a network for intelligence, communications and sabotage. During the initial stage of the occupation, guerrillas of different political stripes were busy smuggling important Chinese and Allied nationals out of Hong Kong. One of the first was Liao Chengzhi, who escaped on January 5, 1942.<sup>5</sup> Within the first seven months of occupation, more than three hundred important Chinese nationals were rescued. Among the more well-known names were: He Xiangning, Liu Yazhi, Zhou Taofen, Mao Dun, Qiao Guanhua, Sa Kongliao, Liang Shuming, Hu Die, the famous movie star, and Shang-Guan Xiande, the wife of Yu Hanmou, commander of the Seventh War Zone of the Central Chinese Army.<sup>6</sup> Admiral Chen Ce, the chief Nationalist intelligence agent in Hong Kong who liaised with the British, made an escape on his own.

Escapees from POW camps were assisted by the guerrillas and guerrilla sympathizers, who took them across the water by sampan or overland through mountain paths. The guerrillas worked with the villagers in the New Territories to hide and feed escapees, and lead them into Free China. Children as young as nine years old were recruited into the guerrilla camp to help as runners and as spies. They were called *Singui* (Little Devils).

The first plans for escape from a POW camp were made in Shum Shui Po in January 1942 by Lt.-Col. Lindsay T. Ride, of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps Field Ambulance, and Lance-Corporal Francis Lee Yiu Piu, who had originally been with No. 3 Machine Gun Company of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, but who transferred to Field Ambulance to be with Ride.

Ride was an Australian doctor and teacher who had been appointed to the Chair of Physiology at the University of Hong Kong in 1928. He had served in the First World War and was twice wounded in France. Lee, a slim, bespectacled and shy clerk, worked in the Physiology department and had earned respect and admiration from Ride for his hard work. Lee was not supposed to be in Shum Shui Po camp, because Chinese members of the Hong Kong Volunteers were given permission to return home. He told Ride he remained because he wanted to know what it was like being a POW, and he also wanted to stay in case Ride needed help to escape; he felt he would be of more use inside than outside the camp. He played a vital role in the escape.

Lee made their travel arrangements with the help of contacts inside the camp, guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers who delivered food or supplies. Many were later killed by the Japanese for what they had done. When the escape plans were made, Ride and Lee were joined by Lieutenant D.W. Morley, a lecturer in Engineering at the University of Hong Kong, and Sub-Lieutenant D.F. Davies, a lecturer in Physics at the same university, both from the Hong Kong Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. The group escaped on January 9, 1942.<sup>7</sup>

The party was picked up by sampan and let off on a beach near Castle Peak Road. From there, they walked through the New Territories, dodging Japanese search parties while they made their way to the outskirts of Sai Kung. After the occupation, the Japanese had left the Sai Kung

peninsula in the hands of Wang Jingwei's men. (Wang was a Nationalist minister who defected to the Japanese side. He was Chiang Kaishek's most important rival in the Nationalist party.)<sup>8</sup> Then bandits moved in and caused chaos. Fortunately for the escape party, on January 9, the guerrillas had taken control of the Sai Kung peninsula. When the news of the escape reached the guerrillas and Wang Jingwei's men, they raced to see who could get to the escapees first. The Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade leader was Cai Gualiang, whom Lee brought to meet the escapees at a rendezvous. Ride described in his diary the amazing experience he had of seeing Chinese villagers appear from nowhere to help them. Without them, the escape certainly would have failed. The escape party was given food, shelter and clothing. Dressed as Chinese villagers, they arrived in Free China on January 17, 1942.<sup>9</sup>

In Free China, Ride was instrumental in starting the British Army Aid Group (BAAG) in order to pass much-needed medical supplies into the POW camps, plan escapes and help those who managed to escape on their own to reach safety. BAAG was established under the British Military Intelligence section MI9, with the reluctant approval of the Chinese government, which did not want to have foreign intelligence working within China. However, the British were allies in the war. The work of BAAG in Hong Kong could not have been carried out without the help of the guerrillas. In Ride's report to the War Office, the guerrillas were referred to as "our" guerrillas because they were the escapees' lifeline to Free China, and at times "red" guerrillas because of their Communist leanings. Ride considered them to be "the most active, reliable, efficient and anti-Japanese of all Chinese organizations."<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese guerrillas infiltrated every aspect of life in Hong Kong under Japanese occupation. They were in the city and in the villages. They worked in Japanese banks, printing presses and even in the Japanese high command. Involved in espionage, sabotage and rescue missions, they were an important link between the people of Hong Kong and the free world.

The control in the Japanese occupation zone was actually quite porous. People were smuggled back and forth across Japanese lines between Hong Kong and mainland China. It was also possible to sail to neutral areas like Macao or the French protectorate of Guangzhouwan, and then into China.

Initially, the guerrillas assisted many POWs to escape, but then it became too difficult, and the punishment of the prisoners who were left behind so severe that escape was no longer worthwhile. One especially important part of their work was espionage, and information was passed to the Chinese High Command, some of which was passed on to the Allies. It was with this information that the U.S. Air Force was able to bomb Hong Kong during the occupation, and a number of times guerrillas rescued Allied airmen who were shot down during these bombing raids.

As mentioned before, since 1937, Father had been involved in both an official and an unofficial capacity in the Chinese resistance against the Japanese. He wanted to help as many people as possible, while making sure that his family was well looked after. His resistance activities involved both the Nationalist Chinese government and the pro-Communist guerrillas based in the East River Basin. If it had not been for the protection of the guerrillas, it would have been almost impossible for our family, for the entire duration of the war, to escape unscathed, not only from the Japanese, but also from the Chinese bandits who were just as cruel.<sup>11</sup>

Father did not belong to any political party, and his actions were considered beyond reproach by both the Nationalists and the Communists. Once he overheard that the Nationalist Party was going to arrest Zhou Enlai, who was with the Nationalists at the time (Zhou was the Chinese Communist Party liaison officer with the Nationalist Party, under safe conduct from Chiang Kaishek); he immediately warned Zhou to escape. Zhou never forgot that. After the war, Zhou gave an order to the Xinhua News Agency, which was in effect an unofficial Chinese consulate in Hong Kong, that Father was to be given free access anywhere in China despite the fact that travel to and within China was very restrictive until the 1980s.<sup>12</sup>

Father was in Huizhou, a Chinese guerrilla base in the East River Basin, when Mother and the three of us arrived in China. I don't believe he ever joined the guerrillas because he was a very independent person. Different factions were competing with each other while working against the Japanese. There were actually two types of guerrillas, the "red" guerrillas and the official guerrillas who operated in Guangdong under General Yu Hanmou. In addition, there were spies from Wang Jingwei's group, the British Army Aid Group and others. Father made many friends during those years, such as Soong Chingling, the widow of Dr. Sun Yatsen, and



Edgar Snow, as well as many top officials from the Nationalist government of Chiang Kaishek, and those who later became top officials in the Chinese Communist government, such as Zhou Enlai. After the war, Edgar Snow used Father's office whenever he was in Hong Kong.<sup>13</sup>

Father acted as a liaison between the escapees from Hong Kong, the guerrillas and the Chinese government, and his position was that of a humanitarian. He was frequently mentioned in Lt.-Col. Lindsay Ride's diary for his help in getting supplies such as blankets and medicine to POWs in Hong Kong and to the refugees who made it into China. It was likely that he was able to get these supplies because he was the treasurer of the Chinese Red Cross. Father's other wartime activities will be mentioned in a later chapter. Fourth Uncle told me that he went to see Father in Qujiang (the wartime capital of Guangdong Province after the fall of Guangzhou to the Japanese), in northern Guangdong Province, in 1942, where Father was with Ride at the British Army Aid Group headquarters. Fourth Uncle, who was working for the Bank of China, was fortunate enough to be transferred to London and remained there until 1947. Ride and Father earned each other's respect and became good friends. After the war, when Ride became the vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, he asked Father to be on the Council.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The entire story of the Poy family experience during the attack and surrender of Hong Kong was told by Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.

<sup>3</sup> He wanted to remain in Hong Kong to take care of the medical needs of the population. He was accused by some of being a collaborator and was later interned by the Japanese.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Jiang Shui, "Husong He Xiangning, Liao Chengzhi Muziliang De Jingguo," *Huoyao Zai Xiang Jiang: Gangjiu Dadui Xigong Diqu Kangri Shi Lu* (Anti-Japanese Activities of the Hong Kong-Kowloon Brigade in Saikung), ed. Xu Yueqing (Hong Kong, 1993), pp. 22-26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Ride. *B.A.A.G., Hong Kong Resistance, 1942-1945* (Hong Kong, 1981), p. 27, footnote 2; p. 17; p. 29, footnote 17.

<sup>8</sup> Wang set up a puppet régime in Nanjing as an alternative to Chiang's in



Chongqing.

<sup>9</sup> Ride, *B.A.A.G.*, pp. 31-44.

<sup>10</sup> Col. L.T. Ride, *Report on the Activities of a M.I. 9/19 Organization in South China by Colonel L.T. Ride, lately Commandant B.A.A.G.*, written at Whitehall for the War Office, 1946, Public Record No. WO 208/3260, Section B.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with He Mingsi, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## CHAPTER 15

### A Family on the Run

The years between 1941 and 1945 were the early years of my life. As a war baby, my family and I went into China as refugees. Despite the fact that I was very young, I do have memories of events that have remained fresh in my mind.

Those who had to live under Japanese occupation were constantly exposed to the widespread propaganda of “a New Asia where Asians were ruled by Asians,” meaning Asians would be ruled by the Japanese. People constantly lived in fear. The wealthier managed to buy food at black market prices, and the rest just died from starvation.

By the beginning of 1942, the Japanese military made a public announcement of their intention to reduce the population in Hong Kong from 1.6 million to what they deemed a “manageable” number of five hundred thousand. They very nearly succeeded. The unfortunate were picked up in the streets and taken by truckloads to junks in the harbour. These were towed out to sea and sunk or set on fire. In 1942 alone, 83,435 burials were recorded, many being victims of war, terrorism and reprisals.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the population was reduced by starvation to the point where cannibalism was practised. The rice ration of 8.46 ounces per person per day was provided for those who were fortunate enough to get it, and this was often mixed with sand.

The streets of Hong Kong were dreadful sights. People lying in the streets were cut up for meat before they were dead, and anyone who forgot to bow to a Japanese soldier risked being decapitated. Whenever Joseph Tam went to visit his girlfriend’s home on Bonham Road, he would see truckloads of dead bodies being dumped into a long rectangular pit on the side of the Upper-level Police Station<sup>2</sup> (the present-day site of King George VI Park), which was situated just below Euston, where the Poys were staying with the Eu family. In Central Market, Chinese tea-houses were turned into gambling places. Special red-light districts in the city, known as comfort stations, were set up for the Japanese soldiers.

The Chinese in Hong Kong were allowed to return to China. Many in the Lee and the Wong families went to different parts of China, although a few chose to remain in Hong Kong.

The only branch of the Lee family that went to our ancestral village, Garlieu, was Second Uncle, with his wife and the three younger children; his older son and daughter went into China with the other members of the Lee family. Therefore, Second Uncle's family's experiences over the war years were different from those of the rest of us. They went by boat through the Pearl River, then made their way to Garlieu village. The two older boys, aged three and five at the beginning of the war, attended the village school.

Whenever there was news that the Japanese soldiers were in the area, the entire village would hide in the little huts in the fields, or they would all move to a neighbouring village to get out of the way. Cousin Raymand, who was three at the beginning of the war, remembers that he and his younger sister would be put into large baskets and carried on a bamboo pole whenever the villagers had to go into hiding. However, his older brother, Hon Ching, who was five at the time, had to walk with the adults. The problems in the village were caused not only by Japanese soldiers, but also by bandits, who looted villages at will.

As a child, Raymand thought it very exciting whenever there was news of bandits approaching, because the whole village would assemble at our ancestral home, which was large enough to accommodate the entire village, and Second Uncle would give out guns to all adult males who defended predetermined posts, turning the house into a fortress. Cousin Raymand does not recollect any major catastrophe caused by bandits during their stay in Garlieu.<sup>3</sup>

Grandmother and Second Grandmother went into China as refugees with their respective families. Helena, the older daughter of Second Uncle, followed Second Grandmother. Fourth Grandmother went on her own to her home town of Wuzhou (Guangxi Province). All the teenaged children of the Lee family, the young uncles and aunts, as well as the eldest grandson, Hon Chiu, travelled to China together, and they attended school wherever they went. The only person who stayed in Hong Kong with her son (Fifth Uncle) was Third Grandmother. Fifth Uncle worked in the family rental office throughout the occupation, collecting rent.<sup>4</sup>

Our family members took two routes to enter China — by land through Sha Tau Kok or by boat to Zhanjiang, formerly known as Guangzhouwan which was under the Vichy government, and therefore neutral. With the exception of Fourth Grandmother, we all met up in China.<sup>5</sup>

Since Father was not able to get back to Hong Kong to take charge of us, he sent an underground messenger, probably a member of the guerrilla force, with a letter to Mother, asking her to follow the man into China with all of us. Mother at first suspected a trap and refused to go. When a second letter came, she made the decision to leave.

Many refugees sewed bits of jewellery into the lining of their clothes, or hid them in the soles of their shoes since they were subject to body searches by the Japanese, as well as to robbery by bandits. Jewellery could be used as cash, but the value was difficult to determine. By far the most valuable form of money was gold coins, which were easily convertible for the purchase of food and other necessary items. Mother must have hidden whatever she could in our baggage and clothing. However, she buried the bulk of her jewellery in the garden of the Big House with the help of her cousin's husband, Bill Poy.

In February 1942, my family left for China together with thousands of refugees from Hong Kong. Mother took four-year-old Richard, two-year-old Deanna, and me, nine months old, two servants, and six huge bags, and headed across the harbour by boat to the train station on the Kowloon side, accompanied by Fourth Uncle and Bill Poy, and, I suspect, watched over by the guerrillas. Bill Poy had obtained passes from the Kempeitai sergeant by telling them Mother was his sister. He did this to avoid the possibility of us being stopped and searched. With his connections, he was also able to exchange some money for Mother before we left. After the war, Father asked Poy for the name of the Kempeitai sergeant in order to find him to thank him for the passes.<sup>6</sup> Whether he was successful or not, we don't know.

The train was crowded and we had difficulty stuffing our bags in. Fourth Uncle said goodbye at the train station, and we headed for Fan Ling, still accompanied by Bill Poy. We got off at Fan Ling and Mother hired some bicycles to carry our luggage. From there, we walked with a stream of refugees towards Sha Tau Kok, one of the entry points into China. Richard and Deanna were carried by the servants on their backs,

and Mother carried me. At Sha Tau Kok, Bill Poy said goodbye to us, and Mother immediately destroyed the Japanese passes. We then boarded a boat. When we got off, we walked for about a day to Huiyang, and boarded another boat again to reach Father in Huizhou.

From Huizhou, we travelled by truck to Shaoguan, in the northern part of Guangdong Province, and then by train to Guilin.<sup>7</sup> Father instructed his younger siblings and nephew Hon Chiu to follow the same route, and to meet us in Guilin. We were able to travel safely through enemy-and-bandit controlled territories probably because we had the protection of the guerrillas.

Soon after my family left, news came to Bill Poy from the Canadian trade commissioner's office (where he was an employee) that he and his family had a chance to go to Canada. It seemed that they were fortunate enough to have been put on the list for exchange between the United States and Japanese governments. The U.S. government was exchanging Americans captured by the Japanese for Japanese interned in America.<sup>8</sup> Since there were more Japanese than Americans, Canadians were allowed to make up the difference. And since all Canadian soldiers in Hong Kong were in POW camps, the deficiencies were made up by the employees of the Canadian trade commissioner's office.

When Bill Poy heard the news, he thought it might be a trap set by the Japanese. He went to their family doctor, who was a relative of his wife, to get her X-ray which showed a scar in one of her lungs. Then he went to see the Kempeitai sergeant to sound him out to see if it was a trap. The sergeant advised him to take his family to Canada when Poy showed him the X-ray, saying that his wife really needed treatment. The sergeant didn't know that it was an old X-ray.

The Poy — Bill and Ethel, Neville and Adrienne — left Hong Kong in August 1942. To this day, the Poy don't know how their names got on the list. (There were others from the trade commissioner's office who were also put on the list to go to Canada.) When they arrived in New York, Canadian immigration officials told them that they were not allowed into the country because they were Chinese (the Chinese Exclusion Act was still in place and remained until 1947), then they saw the Poy's names on the exchange list. They were permitted to stay, becoming the first Chinese refugees in history to arrive in Canada. They were given housing, and Bill Poy continued to work for the Canadian government in Ottawa



in the Department of Trade and Commerce. They had originally planned to return to Hong Kong after the war, but because of conditions in Hong Kong in 1945, Poy decided that the family should stay in Canada. They were made Canadian citizens by an Order in Council in Parliament in April 1949.

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On our way to Guilin, Father encountered C.T. Wu again in Liuzhou. It was here that Wu met Mother, my siblings and me for the first time, and from then on, he became very close to our family.

In Guilin, we lived in a large house outside the entrance to the Seven Star Cave, which is now a well-known tourist attraction. In 1942, houses were built right up to the front of the cave where a road now runs past to bring tourists to the site. Whenever there was an air raid, which happened more and more often as the Japanese advanced towards Guangxi Province, we went into the cave for shelter.

Cousin Hon Chiu, who was in boarding school, used to stay with us on weekends. He came to get a little more to eat, because the boarding schools provided only two meals a day, and the children were always hungry. One of our servants, Suen Zeh, who was with us in Guilin, told Hon Chiu that we had ghosts in our house. From then on, he thought he actually felt someone pressing on top of him when he slept. He never dared to mention this to my parents, but whenever he had the excuse, he slept in Second Aunt's house, which was only five minutes away on Jiangan Road.<sup>9</sup> Hon Chiu said he would go to whichever house had more food. Hon Chiu was with us, off and on, during the entire period of the war, and so was Second Grandmother.

We lived in Guilin for over a year. During our stay there, our two servants gave notice that they were going to leave. Mother thought it best to go back to Hong Kong before the servants got there, because she was sure that they knew where her jewellery was buried. The jewellery was needed in place of cash, and was necessary for our survival. She also needed to bring into China as many of our household necessities as possible.

Leaving us in the care of the servants and Father, Mother headed for Hong Kong with her sister Sarah, through Zhanjiang. However, Aunt Sar-

ah could not get a pass to go to Hong Kong, so Mother went alone, while her sister waited for her in Zhanjiang. This meant that she had the added responsibility of getting Aunt Sarah's household belongings as well as her own.

Mother went back to the Big House to gather our belongings with the help of servants who had remained in Hong Kong. The first two floors of the Big House were covered with dead bodies. These were bodies of looters who had died from shrapnel or had been killed by Japanese soldiers who shot looters on sight. It seemed the looters never made it to the third floor where my family used to live. Mother told us how they had to walk over the dead bodies to get around. She used the third floor to pack the household belongings because the parquet floors on the ground and second floors were caked with blood. (After the war they had to be completely replaced because they could not be cleaned.) I can't even begin to imagine how Mother managed.

Mother stayed in the Lee Building, further up the hill from Wan Chai, which had not been looted. She saw her parents and her younger sister, Josephine, who visited her there. In Mother's later years, especially after Father died, whenever she came across any difficulties, she would tell me that, since she had survived the war, she was no longer afraid of anything.

Mother stayed in Hong Kong for a couple of weeks, then left by boat for Zhanjiang to meet Sarah. Everyone was convinced that Mother was well protected by the guerrillas. She brought with her not only her jewellery, hidden in all kinds of places, but also more than twenty large bags of household necessities, some of which belonged to her sister. The most important items were warm clothing and padded silk blankets.<sup>10</sup>

People had the most imaginative ways of hiding things during war time. I love the story of how one of my parents' friends, Lucy Chan, a lawyer, whom I was to meet in 1949, handled the situation. She boldly wore all her jewellery, big diamonds and all, and capably convinced the Japanese soldiers that they were fake, since no one in their right mind would do something like that!

Throughout the war years, Mother sold or bartered her jewellery for our family to live on. For personal reasons, Father refused repeated offers to work as an engineer for the Americans in China, but carried on with his war-time resistance activities and was, therefore, without an income.

On a voluntary basis, he worked closely with the Chinese central government, the East River guerrillas, as well as with the British Army Aid Group. He had all his light-coloured clothing dyed dark in order to cut down on laundry. Being a thrifty person, his needs were few. We were barely managing financially, but he told Mother that everything would be fine when the war was over. She was not to worry about our lack of possessions or the disposal of her jewellery, for he would replace them, and he certainly kept his promise.

When the Japanese reached Guangxi in 1942, the repair and completion of the Qian Qui (Guizhou Guangxi) railway lines<sup>11</sup> became of immediate importance for the movement of refugees. The central government formed a committee of four engineers,<sup>12</sup> headed by Hou Jiayuan, who was a Kuomintang (Nationalist) member. However, they still needed someone capable and reliable to supervise the work; Father was chosen for the job, and made an honorary Kuomintang executive member.<sup>13</sup>

At that time, C.T. Wu was the manager of the Yong Guang Coal Company<sup>14</sup> in Guilin. Father convinced him that he would have a better future with us, and he became Father's secretary. Father needed someone like Wu who could speak Mandarin fluently, as Father could not. Wu often had to express what Father wanted to say at meetings. The two of them represented the central government, and neither one was a genuine Kuomintang member.<sup>15</sup>

Wu accompanied our family to Yishan, in Guangxi Province, where the head office of the Railway Administration was located. Here, Director Hou Jiayuan gave us a piece of land close to the office. Father designed and personally supervised the building of a two-storey house for us to live in. This house was built in the typical local fashion, of woven bamboo sheets patched with mud. Ours was better built than most, because Father had some concrete mixed in with the mud, and the mixture was thick enough to stop the wind from coming through the walls.<sup>16</sup> By the time we built our house in Yishan, Second Grandmother had rejoined us.

All through the war years, Father was, among other things, a volunteer treasurer for the Red Cross in China. Because of this connection, he had in his possession the drug sulphanimide, which was not readily available in China. Antibiotics were not heard of at that time. While in

Yishan, C.T. Wu had a bad infection on his arm that was treated by this drug.<sup>17</sup>

From time to time, C.T. Wu had to represent Father in a supervisory capacity when Father was down with malaria.<sup>18</sup> In later years, Father always prided himself that he had never been sick in his life, but he had forgotten the war years. When Father's health deteriorated to the point where he felt he had to resign his post as the honorary Kuomintang executive member looking after the repair and building of the Qian Qui railway lines, he found alternative employment for Wu. Through his friends Lu Yanming,<sup>19</sup> Lian Yingzhou<sup>20</sup> and Ou-Yang Qi,<sup>21</sup> Father arranged a job for Wu with the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore in Liuzhou. This bank was owned by overseas Chinese from Shantao, China, and under normal conditions, only Chinese from Shantao were trusted as employees. An exception was made for Wu because of Father's recommendation, and he was put in a position of trust, with responsibility for buying supplies for the bank.<sup>22</sup> However, a few months later Liuzhou fell to the Japanese, and the bank moved to Chongqing. Mr. Wu moved to Chongqing with the bank.

By 1943, with Japanese troops advancing, it was too dangerous to stay in Guilin. The five teenagers — my uncles, aunts and cousin Hon Chiu — needed to move to safer areas, but train tickets were impossible to come by. Former Lee Theatre employee and friend of the family, Yuen Yaohong, came to their rescue. He knew someone high up in the central government bureaucracy, Huang Maolan, whose father was a general. Yuen persuaded the government employees to let the teenagers cram into the general's private carriage on the train. They arrived in Liuzhou, temporarily safe. From there, they took a train to Yishan. By that time, we had already left for Dushan in Guizhou Province. Second Grandmother was still in our house in Yishan when the five of them moved in. Hon Chiu remembers that we had a garden where we planted a large quantity of tomatoes, and we also raised chickens. It was at this time that he learned to kill chickens. He said if he had not, no one would have had chicken for dinner. The teenagers stayed in Yishan for a little while and then followed us to Dushan.

Transportation was always a problem in China, particularly during the war. Father's friend, Wang Aigai, who was in charge of transportation



for the Bank of China, had a fleet of trucks which provided a means of transport for our family members from Yishan to Dushan. Dushan was a hilly town, and our house was on the outskirts. Conditions were primitive, and there was no running water. When the teenage uncles, aunts and Hon Chiu arrived, they attended school there; Hon Chiu was in junior high school at the time. Father would take Hon Chiu with him every day to bathe in a nearby brook with a waterfall, no matter how cold it was. My older brother was spared because he was too young to withstand the cold. Father used to tell Hon Chiu about his past, and about his engineering studies at Oxford.<sup>23</sup> The bonding between uncle and nephew began at this time, and Mother remembered Hon Chiu saying that he wished to be like Father when he grew up.

In Dushan I became very ill. I was just skin and bones and too weak to hold my head up. Mother said I looked like a starved kitten, small and frail. I was taken to a very primitive hospital, and one day the woman missionary doctor told Mother that I was about to die, and that Father should be called to see me for the last time. My teenage Sixth Uncle, who was with Mother at the time, hopped on his bike and rode home to fetch Father. When Father heard the news, he came, bringing with him the only “magical” drug he had in his possession — sulphanilamide. The doctor had never heard of it, but Father asked her to give it to me, since there was nothing to lose. That saved my life.

I was a burden during the war because I was sick all the time, and ended up in hospital wherever we went. I had intestinal problems, dehydration, and once I had lymphangitis of the leg. My parents thought many times that they had lost me. On top of that, both my parents and my older brother had malaria. Fortunately, we all survived, and I live to tell the tale.

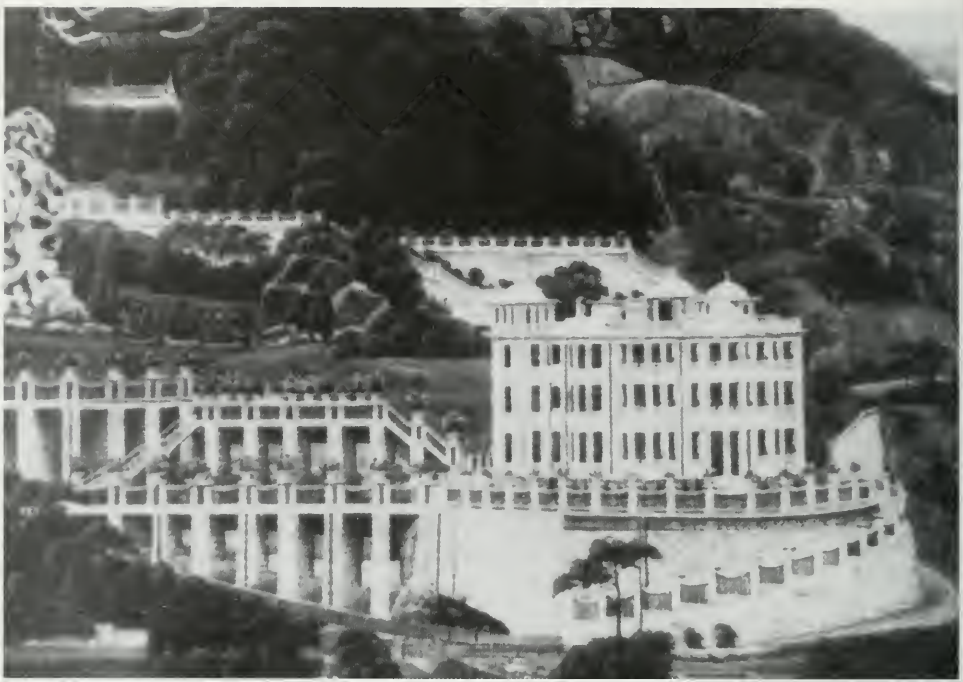
As the Japanese troops were advancing into Guizhou, it was time for us to leave Dushan. By this time, I was old enough to know what was going on. After one of the bombing raids, Mother and I happened to walk past our former house. She was very surprised that I immediately recognized it even though the roof was gone, with only the thick walls still standing.

Once again we had the help of Wang Aigai’s transport fleet of the Bank of China. We travelled on top of the cargo to Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou. The journey along the hilly mountain roads was treacherous,





Grandfather and my father



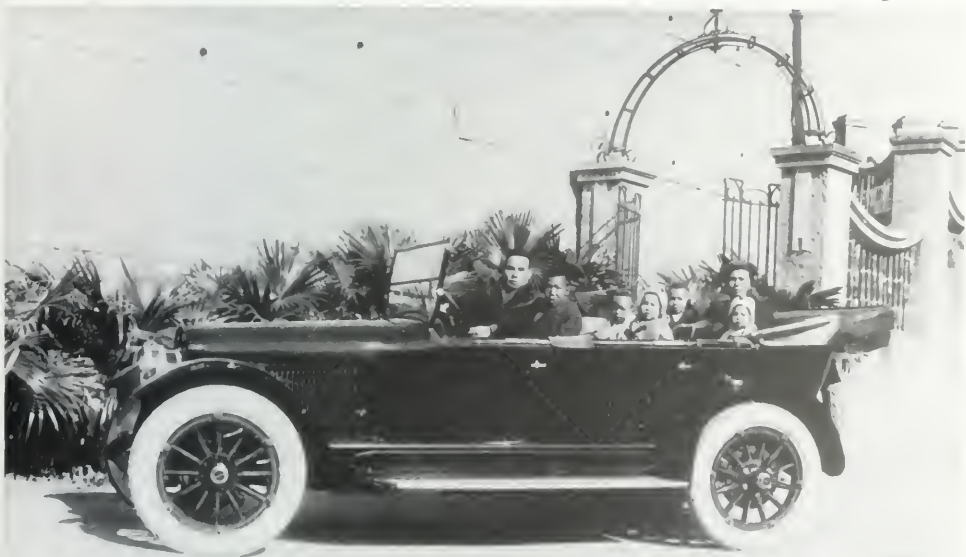
The Big Home and Gardens



The Lee Building



Grandfather and Grandmother with the children in the Big House



Grandfather and Grandmother with the children at the main gate of the Big House





Hong Kong around 1843, showing No. 1 and No. 2 dwellings  
of the taipans of Jardine Matheson on East Point Hill



Entrance to the Lee Gardens



Lee Theatre in the 1950s





Father at Oxford 1923-27



Father driving with friends  
in England 1923-27



My parents' wedding 1928



My parents (on the left) with friends at their villa in Conghua 1935





Li aborigines  
on Hainan Island  
1935-37



Father driving a tractor  
on Hainan Island  
1935-37



My family in China 1944

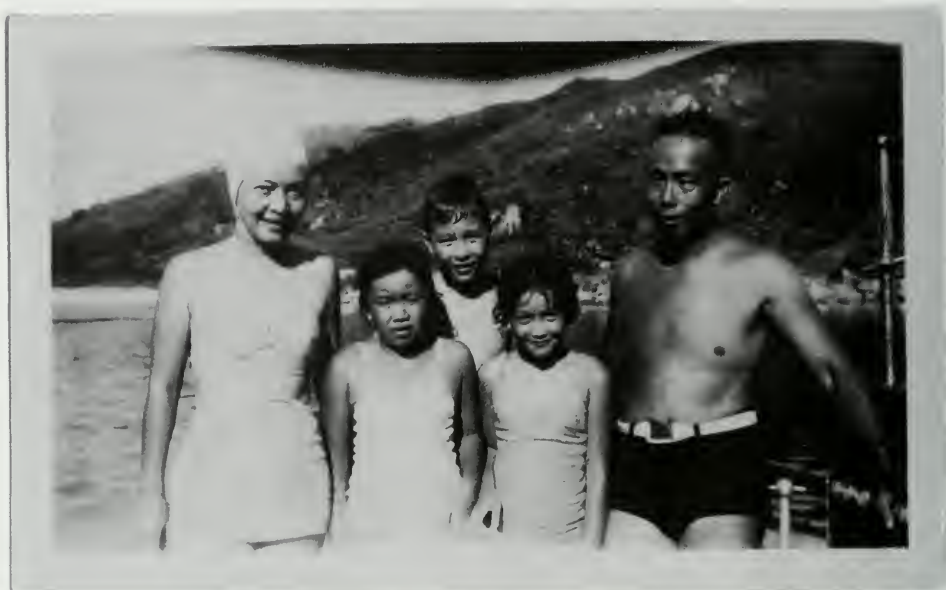




Hong Kong, April 11, 1946.  
Taken with Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt. Mother second from right



My parents with Hong Kong Governor  
Sir Alexander and Lady Grantham 1950



On our first launch *Swan* 1947



My family 1949



Father with the Duchess of Kent



Father with Princess Margaret





My parents 1952



Launch picnic 1955



Taken with my parents the day  
I left for university in Canada, August 1959



Father led the trade mission  
to West Africa 1960



#### HE GIVES PREMIER WINE CUP

Premier Kwame Nkrumah admiring an ancient Chinese wine cup presented to him at Flagstaff House yesterday by Mr R. C. Lee (left) leader of a four-man trade mission from Hong Kong now in the country





Father in 1964

Awarded to Father  
from the Emperor of Japan  
March 12, 1969



Father as the Masonic Grand Master  
of Hong Kong and the Far East 1964



Neville, Ashley and I visited my parents in Hong Kong 1968



My parents, Chinese New Year, 1968



Father and me in Toronto 1974



The establishment of Yamaichi International (Hong Kong) Ltd., July 5, 1972. Father on front left



My parents' visit to Xinjiang Autonomous Region 1977



L to R: I.M Pei, Father, W. Szeto, Hon Chiu. Architects  
Pei and Szeto showing the model of Sunning Plaza 1977



My parents' Golden Anniversary, February 1978





Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train ceremony, 1979.  
 Centre: Governor Sir Murray MacLehose.  
 My parents in the front row, second and fourth from the right



Father with Chinese President Li Xiannian 1982





Mother with Deng Ying Chao, widow of Zhou Enlai



Mother with Cai Chang,  
chairwoman of the  
All China Women's  
Federation 1980s



Mother with Chinese President Yang Shangkun 1989

铭泽先生大鉴：

此次应邀访港，承贵  
周到安排和热情接待，  
不胜感谢之至。我们已于二  
月五日返回北京。由于临近春节，  
未能及时写信问候，殊以  
为歉。遥想阁下春节愉快

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中华人民共和国电子工业部

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快，诸事顺遂。谨祝

健康长寿！

江泽民  
二月廿二日

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Letter from Jiang Zemin to Father 1981



With my third aunt  
Ansie, being welcomed  
in our ancestral village,  
Garlieu 1993

and going downhill was hair-raising, especially when the brakes did not work very well. Along the way, the convoy was stopped several times by Nationalist troops turned bandits. Fortunately, we were not harmed.<sup>24</sup>

As a child of two, I can remember climbing on top of the cargo using something that resembled a rope ladder, and holding on for dear life. I also remember being very motion sick and throwing up hard-boiled eggs. Wherever we travelled in the primitive unhygienic parts of China, Father would not buy any cooked food (he described all the meats as looking black because they were covered with flies), so we had to survive on hard-boiled eggs. It has taken me fifty years to get over my phobia of hard-boiled eggs.

It was a lengthy journey. When we arrived in Guiyang, it was evening, and the sky was getting dark. The trucks arrived at a theatre, and out came former Lee Theatre employee Yuen Yaohong with a bag in his hand. He said to Father, "Dick, take this. It's for you." It was a bag filled with money. Hon Chiu said that it was a moment he would never forget; he was so impressed. No one in our family had money during the war. Yuen was managing that theatre in Guiyang at the time. He also looked after our living accommodations. In a house that was not soundproof, with my family upstairs, and Second Grandmother, the teenage uncles and aunts, Hon Chiu and his sister Helena downstairs, Hon Chiu said he could hear everything that went on upstairs.

From Guiyang we moved on to Chongqing, in Sichuan Province, again by the Bank of China convoy. This part of the journey was more secure because it was better controlled by the Nationalist troops. When we entered Sichuan, we were exposed to practices and foods that were distinctly different from those in southeast China. Sichuan foods were hot with chili, and it was difficult for us to eat them because we were not used to them. Mother found appalling the custom of the wealthier inhabitants having their coffins made ahead of time and placed under their own beds.

Since I was just a small child during the war years, I have only interesting memories. The adults had their worries, and I was the observer; that is, when I was not in hospital. I had the greatest adventures with our servants all over the countryside, in my wooden clogs in the summer and cloth shoes in the winter. Leather was saved for making boots for the soldiers, so civilians did not have leather shoes. I would walk with our serv-



ant along the rice paddies to see the farmers working and watch people picking snails. In our home, snails from rice fields were never allowed to be eaten because of parasites. Just the same, it was interesting to watch.

One day, the servant and I heard a great commotion as we were walking, and we went to see what the excitement was all about. We saw a large catfish struggling for air, stranded in very shallow water. It was going to be somebody's dinner. Another time, we heard that in one of the farms in the vicinity, a cow was about to give birth. The servant took me there just in time to see the birth of the calf. It was a wonderful learning experience for a child. Sometimes we would go to buy eggs, and some of these eggs would be fertilized. I still remember the embryos when the eggs were cracked open. Once, someone had the idea of having goat's milk, so my teenaged Seventh Uncle got hold of a goat and tried to milk it. There was a lot of squealing. What a sight!

When we entered Chongqing, we crossed the Yangtse River. We joined Grandmother, Third Uncle and Fifth Aunt, who were fortunate enough to have flown directly from Guilin in the transport plane of the Shanghai Commercial Bank.<sup>25</sup> They had not experienced the hardship that we had. Sixth Uncle, sixteen years old, wanted to join the Chinese army but was turned down because of his age. He left school anyway in order to make some money, and worked for the Chinese government as a translator because his English was good. He was later sent to Burma.

In Chongqing, my family lived in Tao Yuan, a complex of houses that belonged to the Tao family, friends of my parents. The complex was built by Tao Guilin, who was the biggest contractor in China, having built some of the most important buildings in the country, especially in Nanjing and Shanghai.<sup>26</sup> The Tao family lived in the large house on the left as you entered the gate, and we lived in the last house on the far right.

Grandmother, Third Uncle and other uncles and aunts lived in Tian Tan Xin Cun, which was owned by the Shanghai Commercial Bank. Third Uncle, being a director of the bank, had the use of one of its houses.

By the time we were in Chongqing, I was close to three years old. I remember the little bungalow we had in Tao Yuan, on the banks of the Yangtse River. It was a simple house, with the living room in front, and the bedrooms at the back. The house was perched on the bank of the river, so even though the entrance was at street level, the end of the bedrooms was high above ground, over the steep river-bank. The interesting feature

of this house was that the kitchen was in a separate building down towards the river.

My brother, sister and I used to catch fireflies after dinner. We would put them in a bottle, and watch them glow. We caught turtles along the river-bank and tied them to a string attached to the back of the sofa in the living room so that they would eat the mosquitoes.

The kitchen was so far down the river-bank that it often flooded. Whenever the water rose, all the adults in the family would rush down to the kitchen to move everything to the house. After each flood, I would have something new to play with, because the water always brought interesting things to the shore. Once we caught a crab that I wanted to play with, but Father was afraid that the pincers would hurt me. He didn't know about tying the pincers, so he crushed them and put mercurochrome on them! He obviously didn't know the biological difference between a human being and a crab. He tied a string on it so that I could walk it. We had no toys in those days, and I certainly never missed them.

I had friends I played with and visited, who taught me to speak a childish version of Mandarin which I've been able to retain to a certain extent. During our years in China, I came to be called Mei Mei, for little sister, because I was the youngest of the three, and after the war, I got stuck with the name May, short for Mei Mei. It was a name I disliked because it is so common among Chinese girls.

While in Chongqing, we visited with our relatives, many of whom ended up there. In fact, with the advancing Japanese armed forces, that was the safest place to be, since it was the war-time capital of China.

On New Year's Eve 1944, my mother's younger brother Daniel, his wife Helen, and their children were visiting us at Tao Yuan. After dinner, while the adults were chatting in the living room, the children went into my parents' bedroom to play. All of a sudden, my older brother felt sick, and he climbed up on a chair and vomited out the window. The rest of the children clambered up to see what was happening, and suddenly my cousin Joan fell out of the wide window. Being the youngest, I was watching on the sideline. None of the older children made a move, so I went into the living room to tell the adults that cousin Joan had fallen out of the window!

One can imagine the hysteria. It was fortunate that the electric wires strung across the back of the house under the window broke her fall.

Otherwise she would have fallen a distance equal to two stories. Since it was not only war time in Chongqing, but also New Year's Eve, getting medical attention was not a simple matter. However, my uncle and aunt managed to get a couple of rickshaws to take them to the closest hospital. Fortunately, cousin Joan was not badly injured, and ended up with nothing more than a scar under her chin. Till the end of my parents' days, they talked about my presence of mind at the age of three and a half.

In May 1945, hostilities ended in Europe, and the war against Japan assumed a different character. The objective in the Pacific became one of bringing the war to a speedy conclusion with as few casualties as possible. On August 6, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and was followed by another one on Nagasaki three days later. On August 14, 1945, at 11:30 PM Tokyo time, the emperor of Japan formally announced an unconditional surrender to the Supreme Command of the Allied Forces.

On the same night in Chongqing, the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore was having a dinner party. Among the guests were Minister of Foreign Affairs Chen Qingyun and the former mayor of Shanghai, Wu Tiechen. Chen's family telephoned the bank to let him know that the Japanese had surrendered. Bank Chairman Lian Yingzhou and the general manager, Ou-Yang Qi, immediately asked C.T. Wu to buy firecrackers. Lian and Ou-Yang, who were from Chaozhou (Guangdong Province), did not know that the people of Sichuan only lit firecrackers when someone dies. When the people on the street heard the firecrackers going off, they thought someone at the bank had died. That night, when the news was broadcast, no one slept. The crowds in the streets celebrated, and everyone got drunk.<sup>27</sup>

In Hong Kong, the moment the news of the Japanese surrender came, everyone went out into the streets to look for Japanese soldiers to beat up.<sup>28</sup> Chiang Kaishek claimed that Hong Kong was part of the China theatre, and therefore the Japanese forces should surrender to him. The future of Hong Kong had been discussed in earlier war-time summit meetings, and the retrocession of Hong Kong had been supported by President Roosevelt. However, Churchill was not going to let that happen. For the next few days, there was confusion as to who was going to take over from the Japanese government in Hong Kong. A message was sent to Franklin Gimson in Stanley camp, through the British Army Aid

Group agent, Y.C. Leung, code-named “Phoenix,” on August 23, to take control of the government. Three days later, Gimson moved out of the camp to take up office in the French Mission building in town. On August 30, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt arrived with the Royal Navy to begin the post-war military government of Hong Kong, which lasted until May 1, 1946.

In August 1945, Father, Third Uncle and Grandmother flew back to Hong Kong from Chongqing on the plane of Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, who was the special representative of Prime Minister Churchill in the China theatre. Having been under Japanese rule since December 1941, Hong Kong’s monetary system was in disarray. As one of the first to arrive back in Hong Kong, Father was asked to carry by hand a large amount of cash for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.<sup>29</sup>

Mother and the three of us, together with our servants, returned to Hong Kong the usual way, as did other refugees in China. Mother told us that the war was over and we were going home. Father had to go first because he was needed immediately to help Hong Kong get back on its feet. Part of our journey was on a small, crowded, flat-bottomed boat, on which we placed our bedding next to each other. The last part of our journey was by train, and seats were difficult to come by. Fortunately, our family knew the stationmaster, who told Mother that we had to be at the station at four o’clock in the morning in order to get seats. We took his advice, and we were on our way home.

Our teenaged uncles and aunts and cousin Hon Chiu remained in Chongqing to continue their schooling. Food for the boarders in the schools in Chongqing was quite plentiful, unlike Guilin’s two meals a day, so when the older members of the family left to go back to Hong Kong, they were not as badly missed. During this time, whenever the teenagers needed money for school fees and living expenses, they would go to the Shanghai Commercial Bank. Hon Chiu remembers someone by the name of Karl Wu, a friend of Third Uncle at the bank, who would invite Hon Chiu for coffee from time to time. Hon Chiu was very impressed by the beautiful mansion Wu owned.

In 1948, when Hon Chiu graduated from high school, he planned to go to Shanghai to stay with Third Aunt and her American husband, Henry Sperry, in order to take the entrance exams for Jiaotong and Qinghua universities. By that time, the Chinese Communist Party was already in



control of northeast China and had reached Beijing. Father telegraphed him to return to Hong Kong immediately to take the entrance exam for Lingnan University in Guangzhou, and to wait for an opportunity to go to the United States. When Hon Chiu left Chongqing to return to Hong Kong, Wu saw him off at the airport. The following year, China was taken over by the Communists, and Hon Chiu never saw Wu again.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Selwyn-Clarke, *Footprints*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Joseph Tam, Toronto, January 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Raymand Lee, Vancouver, February 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, October 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bill Poy, Toronto, November 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, October 1996.

<sup>10</sup> They are filled with silk fibres instead of eiderdown and are very light and warm. When Mother returned to Guilin, she gave a padded silk blanket to C.T. Wu, for which he was very thankful, because throughout the war years he was always cold, but could not possibly afford to buy one himself. To this day, he has high regard for Mother as a very brave woman.

<sup>11</sup> From Guizhou to Guilin.

<sup>12</sup> Ling Hongxun, Shi Zhiren, Hou Jiayuan, Yuan Menghong.

<sup>13</sup> Father never joined any political party.

<sup>14</sup> The position was given to him by Cheng Goonshing, who was married to Second Aunt. Yong Guang Coal Company was very profitable because of the need for coal for the railways, and their sales were guaranteed. Tan Nailiang, Cheng's nephew, was the accountant. Tan and C.T. Wu lived in a bamboo-mud house right by the office of the company.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>16</sup> C.T. Wu participated in the supervision of this building.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>18</sup> C.T. Wu was very happy to have a free economy railway pass. He was always welcomed by the railway staff because of his love of ping-pong. He said there really weren't too many forms of entertainment available during the war, and ping-pong was one of them. The games usually lasted much longer than the work supervision. Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> General manager of Guo Hua Bank, and an influential person in financial



circles, both in China and among overseas Chinese.

<sup>20</sup> Chairman of the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore.

<sup>21</sup> General manager of the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Third Uncle was a director.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Sing Sheng, Hong Kong, October 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Josephine Chiu, Vancouver, April 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## CHAPTER 16

### Hong Kong after the War

**W**e were happy to be home and lucky to have homes to return to. The first toy I owned was a doll my parents bought me for my first Christmas in Hong Kong in 1945; I was four and a half years old. It remained my favourite toy throughout my childhood.

The most important tasks the postwar military administration faced were the repatriation and resettling of prisoners of war and internees, the closure of the prison camps, and the demobilization of the armed forces and auxiliary defence services. For that reason, there was a great shortage of government staff, so, for the first time, local Chinese and Portuguese personnel were given much more responsibility than previously. Because of this opportunity, the credentials they were able to establish during this period could no longer be ignored by future Hong Kong governments.

The Lee family was again living in our ancestral homes of the Big House and Lee Building; we still had our large gardens where we had many fruit trees, a large chicken coop and a tennis court. Grandmother moved back to the Big House with her own children. Third Uncle subsequently married and lived on the third floor as we had done before the war. Fourth Uncle, who returned from England in 1947, and Fifth Aunt lived on the second floor with Grandmother. Grandmother's other daughter, Second Aunt, was married before the war and lived with her husband and son on their own.

My own family moved into the Lee Building, and occupied the top-floor apartment on the left. There were six apartments altogether, three on the right and three on the left, with a wide central stairway. No one lived in the apartment below us. Father's old friend from his resistance days, Major Hector Shulwan, rented the ground-floor apartment. Shulwan probably had connections with the British Army Aid Group in China. An English engineer who spoke fluent Mandarin, Shulwan was a confirmed bachelor and his only hobby was car engines. During the day, he worked as director of the Labour Department in Hong Kong; after work,

he would put on his overalls, and we would always find him under his car. I was fascinated by this tall man in the greasy overalls whom we called Uncle Shulwan.

On the right side of the building, Second Uncle and his family lived on the top floor, Second Grandmother one floor below, and Fourth Grandmother lived on the bottom floor. With the children of Second Uncle and the frequent visits of many cousins, we had many playmates.

My brother, sister and I shared a large bedroom. At night, one of the servants would set up her bed in our room to keep us company. She would tell us stories from Chinese operas and, at times, these stories were so long that they would carry on for many nights. In the summer, we all slept with mosquito nets over our beds. In the winter, our beds were warmed by brass hot-water containers wrapped with towels and pinned with large safety pins.

Even though Father was considered well off, and we lived in a nice building that the Lee family owned, we had very little money. For the first and only time in her life that I remember, Mother made some of my clothes. I remember Mother dressing quite simply and wearing costume jewellery.

The most important concern to families who returned Hong Kong was school for their children, but in postwar Hong Kong, schools were in a state of disarray. Many of the buildings were either destroyed or so badly damaged that they could not be used. With the increasing number of people moving into Hong Kong from China,<sup>1</sup> there was constantly a shortage of schools. Classes were held in any available building. Between 1946 and 1948, I changed schools four times. Two of the four soon ceased to exist.

In the 1950s, Rev. R.O. Hall, bishop of Hong Kong, set up Workers' Schools for refugee children. The colonial government, suspecting these schools of communist infiltration<sup>2</sup> and anti-British indoctrination, closed them down and, in some cases, deported the teachers.<sup>3</sup> The Education Ordinance of 1953 and its subsidiary regulations prohibited any kind of political activity in schools, including discussions of contemporary Chinese politics or of colonialism. For that reason, I never had lessons in modern Chinese history, and no questions about the colonial government would ever be allowed in Hong Kong.

Due to a lack of space for the number of students, improvisations, such as three-sessional schools, had to be made by the government. This meant that three sessions of school were held in the same building, morning, afternoon and evening, each with their own set of teachers and students. In 1952, my older brother, Richard, and my sister, Deanna, were sent to school in England. My younger brother, Christopher, and I attended St. Paul's Co-educational College. We were very glad to be in the morning session, which started at eight o'clock.

With a shortage of food, the first years after the war were very difficult for everyone in Hong Kong. Food was rationed, and supplies were controlled by the United Nations. The rebuilding of a healthy, growing community was constantly under threat from a sheer lack of nutrition.

On May 14, 1946, the government appointed Father as rice controller for Hong Kong. The following week, Father held a press conference to announce that flour and green peas would be added to the ration, since Hong Kong was allowed only twenty thousand tons of rice by the United Nations, which was half the required amount for the population.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the month, he protested to the United Nations because of the limitation imposed on Hong Kong. By September, the rice ration had to be reduced again, so biscuits and additional flour were added. Throughout 1947, conditions remained stable, but by the beginning of 1948, prices for flour and rice began to increase. In order to keep prices down, Father allowed the sale of flour and cheaper rice imported from Thailand<sup>5</sup> and Vietnam, which met with public approval. On May 6, 1948, Father resigned his voluntary post, but was kept on as an advisor by the government.<sup>6</sup>

Father carried out his duty with such efficiency and correctness that no one, not even family and close friends, was given preference with the rice ration coupons.<sup>7</sup> I remember one incident in school when one of the boys teased me and said, "Your father is the 'shit' Controller." When I related this to him, Father said with a smile, "Ask him what he eats."

During those early years, when there were shortages and small industries had a difficult time, Father tried his best to help. Companies such as Yu Tat Chi, which manufactured candied ginger, and the Garden Bakery, which needed sugar for baking, were grateful to Father for arranging supplies of sugar.<sup>8</sup> I remember the beautiful ginger jars and the wonderful candied ginger we used to have after dinner. Garden Bakery sent my

parents cakes on special occasions, and they continued to do so even after Father died. I saw the beautiful Christmas cake sent from Garden Bakery to Mother in 1995, the year before she died.

I subsequently learned that, because of food shortages and the disorganization of the schools in Hong Kong, the Poy family decided to stay in Canada where conditions were much better.

Soon after the end of the Second World War, civil war broke out in China. Refugees started to stream into Hong Kong and the population increased from 1.6 million in 1946 to 2.36 million by the end of 1950. In the first six months of 1950 alone, seven hundred thousand refugees poured in from the mainland.

In May of that year, the government adopted a quota system, which proved to be totally ineffective. Most of the refugees were unskilled labourers who were willing to work and were determined to make their new homes in Hong Kong. Some of them did not even know where Hong Kong was before they arrived. There were squatters everywhere. Many of the huts on the hillsides were made from boards or scrap metal from junk-yards, and there were beggars everywhere.

Some of the refugees were successful industrialists who escaped to Hong Kong with whatever they could bring with them and, again, it was often precious jewellery. These industrialists helped to transform the colony into a manufacturing centre and this will be mentioned again later in this chapter.

Occasionally, my parents would receive a phone call in the night from a relative or a friend who had escaped from China and had reached Hong Kong. I listened to these muffled conversations with the greatest interest.

At Lowu and Man Kam To, the Chinese Communists erected loudspeakers pointing towards Hong Kong, pouring forth propaganda and abuse against the British, in general, and the authorities in Hong Kong, in particular. Along the border stood the guards from China and Hong Kong, facing each other. The Chinese troops would shoot anyone who was caught trying to escape. However, many did escape, both on land and by boat, which contributed to the increase in Hong Kong's population as well as its future prosperity.

With the large increase in population, one of the major problems the Hong Kong government faced was the shortage of water. Up to that



point, Hong Kong had depended on rain-water, which was collected in reservoirs. The water supply became inadequate, and water had to be rationed. Depending on the time of the year, water might be available for only a few hours twice a week. Because of the lack of water pressure, those who lived on the upper floors in high-rises might not get any water from their taps at all. It was particularly desperate in the poorer sections of the city where people had to line up at public taps with buckets, and fights often broke out. The newspapers and radio stations reported many stories of woe. At least the wealthy could check themselves into a hotel when they needed a good shower, because there was no rationing for the hotels. I remember this time very well. Our lives were consumed by this problem. My parents would tell us when water was available and insisted that we be frugal with it. Our household staff used to fill the bathtubs and all available containers when the water was turned on.

A large new reservoir was built at Tai Lam Chung in the New Territories, but when it was finished, the government realized that it was not big enough. The government could not keep up with the needs of the increasing population.

I remember clearly my first experience with hearing fascinating stories about what was happening in China. Two visitors, Sing Sheng<sup>9</sup> and Dorothy Chu, who was related to the Tao family with whom we stayed in Chongqing, suddenly arrived on the first day of Chinese New Year 1947. That January, the two had left Shanghai for Hong Kong to obtain visas to go to the United States, and the plane in which they were travelling was diverted to Manila because of stormy weather. Then two of the four engines caught fire, and the pilot brought the plane down in the China Sea. Seven of the thirty-six passengers died, and the survivors stayed afloat in two rubber rafts for thirty hours until they were rescued by an American ship. After being hospitalized for two weeks, Sing Sheng and Dorothy finally arrived in Hong Kong and were welcomed by my parents.<sup>10</sup> They stayed for about a month in the apartment below us and had all their meals with us, while they waited for their visas. I was six years old at the time, and just loved hearing their stories. After they obtained their visas, they returned to Shanghai to prepare to go to the United States. Their timing was good because Shanghai did not fall under the control of the Communists until a year later.

As the civil war in China continued, the writing was on the wall, and many friends and relatives came to Hong Kong between 1948 and 1949. They stayed in the Lee Building because we had an empty apartment just below us. I am not sure whether it was because of a shortage of rental accommodations or because it was a temporary measure, but at one time, there were three families living in that apartment. As children, we thought it was wonderful to have even more playmates, but I was beginning to realize the seriousness of the political upheaval in China by listening to the adults talk. I knew that the new playmates were there only temporarily, and I was quite aware of the overcrowded conditions our guests were living in. Knowing that people had to leave their homes was not a comforting thought.

The apartment was divided into three sections for the three families. One of them was the family of Mother's older sister Pearl. Aunt Pearl left Shanghai with her six children while her husband, C.C. Kwong, stayed behind. Uncle C.C. was a highly qualified engineer who felt that he could stay in China to help the country. By 1950, he believed that the political situation was settling down, and he came out to Hong Kong to take his family back to Shanghai. However, they left their eldest son Joseph behind with us because he was of conscription age, and they did not want him to be sent to Korea to be "cannon fodder" now that the Korean War was on. Within two years, their other children escaped back to Hong Kong, one by one. Eventually, Aunt Pearl and Uncle C.C. also escaped.

The Chans were another family — husband, wife and four children. Lucy Chan was the lawyer mentioned earlier who tricked the Japanese soldiers into believing her jewellery was fake. She trained in England at the same time Father studied there.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Chan was the son of an important official in China. The third family was Father's former employer, the mayor of Guangzhou, Liu Jiwen, his wife and their children. Mrs. Liu, a beautiful and serene lady, was a gifted painter. During their stay with us, every day after school I would go downstairs and watch her paint. Because she knew I was so interested, she showed me how to grind traditional Chinese colours and how to use Chinese brushes. Soon I was sitting next to her at her table and she was teaching me the techniques of Chinese

painting. Mrs. Liu told Mother that I had artistic talent, and should be given painting lessons.

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party formed the government of the Peoples' Republic of China, and the Nationalists of the Republic of China under Chiang Kaishek retreated to Taiwan.

In postwar Hong Kong, public health was a major concern for the government. I remember the public health nurses coming to the school to give us typhoid and cholera injections. I often had painful reactions to these, sometimes accompanied by a fever. We also had tuberculosis tests, and when we had our smallpox vaccinations, we had to wear wire covers over the vaccination site to prevent us from scratching. I dreaded those "public health nurse days."

With my usual inquisitiveness, I found out that Father gave blood regularly to the Red Cross. I just happened to ask one day after school because I thought he was home a little earlier than usual. He never talked about it, but it was rather unusual for a Chinese to donate blood in the years immediately after the war.

It is not possible to think of the postwar years without mentioning de-worming. Father was quite aware of the state of hygiene in China during the war, and in Hong Kong right after the war. Once a year on a weekend, during the cool months, we were instructed to eat only very liquid plain rice congee for one day. At the end of the day, Father would give us worm medicine. The idea was that any parasites living in our bodies would be hungry and would ingest the medicine. The next morning, we would be given castor oil with orange juice, a horrible mixture. Presumably, that would eliminate the worms and the eggs from our bodies. Father never planned too far ahead, because it had to be at his convenience. Our cousins always hoped to avoid this procedure, even though they loved sleeping over at our place, but anyone who happened to be with us that weekend would get the same treatment. Father impressed upon us that, if we allowed parasites to live in our bodies, all our nutrition would be taken from us and we would not grow. He was absolutely right. I did have worms in my body and I saw them being expelled.<sup>12</sup>

Besides our annual de-worming ritual, Father also believed his children should be trained to have regular bowel movements. So every evening after dinner, the three of us would troop into the washroom. My

brother would sit on the toilet, my sister on a tall spittoon, and I would be on a small spittoon. Often we just talked and did nothing.

Some time in the late 1940s, my parents came to the realization that my hearing was impaired. This was caused by my frequent illnesses during the war and subsequent ear infections. A friend of Father, Dr. Chan Yik Ping, was an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, trained in Vienna around the same time Father was at Oxford. Like many doctors who were not British-trained and were licensed in China, Dr. Chan was not allowed to have his own practice, and could work only for the Hong Kong government health service.<sup>13</sup> My parents had great respect for his ability and asked him about my hearing loss. He diagnosed a perforated ear-drum in my left ear. So, after school, on a regular basis, Father would take me to see him in the government clinic, despite how busy he was, because he was anxious and concerned. Dr. Chan inserted a thin tissue in place of my ear-drum, and applied an ointment to encourage regrowth. Eventually, my ear-drum did grow back, but I still notice a difference in hearing between my right and left ears.

In 1953, Father became a member of the Urban Council. He immediately spoke out on the lack of affordable housing. He publicly encouraged large companies to work with the government to build housing for their employees by providing affordable mortgages. He knew that this would greatly improve the relationship between employers and employees. The poor people, many of them refugees, lived in shacks on the hillsides or in the open, while others paid landlords to be allowed to build shacks on top of buildings. In many instances, there were no toilets or running water.<sup>14</sup> The crisis in housing caused severe health problems. Father drew attention to the lack of understanding by the general population about public health issues and suggested that the government produce brochures explaining the problems.<sup>15</sup>

On Christmas Day 1953, there was a terrible fire in an area filled with squatters, and fifty-three thousand people were hurt. The government finally acknowledged that a third of the population of Hong Kong was made up of refugees who had nowhere else to go. Something had to be done to integrate them into the community. From then on, the colonial government embarked on an ambitious resettlement program to provide safer housing at minimal cost. This also helped to clear the land occupied



by the squatters for industrial and commercial developments. However, despite the speed with which public housing was built, the squatter population grew even faster.

In 1961, as an unofficial member (appointed from the general population as compared to the bureaucrats sent from England) of the Legislative Council, Father complained that the government was working too slowly. It had promised to move 75,000 people into public housing in 1959. According to Father's information, only 32,432 had been moved as of February 1961. He urged the government to cut the red tape to speed up the process, giving priority to those earning less than \$300 a month.<sup>16</sup>

It took until the 1980s to solve the problems of housing. The shacks on the hillside gradually disappeared and were replaced by high-rise public housing. The majority of these refugees became the backbone of Hong Kong's industrialization.

During the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, the United Nations placed an embargo on China, dealing a fatal blow to the entrepôt trade in Hong Kong. Fortunately for Hong Kong, as mentioned before, some of the refugees had brought with them not only money but industrial and technological know-how. According to one estimate, several billion Hong Kong dollars came with them during this period. Between 1947 and 1949 alone, more than two hundred Shanghai enterprises transferred their registration to Hong Kong.

Industrialists arriving from northeastern China provided a boost to local industries, and were in turn aided by the established international trading networks in Hong Kong.<sup>17</sup> Because of its lack of natural resources, Hong Kong's most valuable resource was its people; much of it included the refugee population and their knowledge and skills. Hong Kong's textile industry originated with these new arrivals. The opening of factories helped to provide jobs for the masses. By the beginning of the 1950s, "Made in Hong Kong" labels began to appear on many manufactured goods, a change from the late 1940s, when "Made in Japan" labels were common. At the same time, there was a growing need for skill and knowledge so that the colony could become competitive internationally.

As more and more factories were built, important changes in social structures occurred. Many unskilled jobs were available, and gradually, factories absorbed all the unskilled labour in Hong Kong, which used to



fill positions as household servants. While the older servants tended to remain with the families they had been with for years, overall the traditional Chinese family with live-in servants gradually declined. Many of these servants were women who originally came from the silk districts of the Pearl River Delta and had worked in the silk industries near their home villages until the Great Depression. When their factories collapsed, they moved to Guangzhou, Macao and Hong Kong. Some were women who had decided they were not going to get married; others were widows who had chosen not to remarry. Since they were illiterate, their only alternative was to work as household servants.<sup>18</sup>

With industrialization in Hong Kong, working in a factory meant being able to have one's own home and family. Government subsidies for housing had helped greatly in this respect, and the standard of living for the majority improved. The positions of household servants were gradually filled by Filipino maids and, later, by maids from Thailand brought into Hong Kong by employment agencies. By the 1970s, live-in household help was almost entirely from Southeast Asian countries.

During those years, Father became involved with grass-root organizations, such as the Szeyup Business Association (an association of people from the area of our ancestral village in China), Wan Chai Kaifong Benevolent Association (a community organization to help the needy), Tung Wah Hospital (a hospital for the poor), Po Leung Kuk (an association for the protection of women and children) and many others. He spent a great deal of time organizing donations of warm clothing, and helped to set up free medical and dental clinics, free primary schools and also donations of free coffins, the latter very important to the poor Chinese. As an education enthusiast, he was often invited to different schools for prize-giving days or for new school openings. Many of these were Chinese-language middle schools catering to the refugee population that needed someone to raise their profile. Throughout his life, Father always had time for those who needed him.

Father played a major role in helping the people of Hong Kong both privately and through the government. In 1946, Father was made a Justice of the Peace (JP). One of his duties was that of acting as a judge in the JP court, presiding over cases of minor infractions, such as hawkers who set up their stands where they were not allowed by law. In appreciation

of Father's service to the community, particularly as the rice controller for Hong Kong, the British government appointed him an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) in 1949.

For me, the real change in Hong Kong began when we started to hear the Shanghai dialect spoken in public, and noticed the odour of "smelly" tofu, a popular Shanghai dish. We were frequently visited by the "Shanghai Woman," a gem agent who, with private references, went to wealthy homes to sell jewels smuggled out of China by refugees. Overnight, there was an abundance of jewels available for sale, the proceeds of which, I understood, were used to finance factories and various other businesses. For the next few years, the "Shanghai Woman" would call on Mother whenever she had something special to sell. She was a chubby lady who wore a plain loose cheongsam, inside which was an undergarment full of secret pockets. I used to watch in great fascination as she unbuttoned her cheongsam, and from each secret pocket of her undergarment came the most beautiful pieces of jewellery. I always hoped she would come when I was home after school, and sometimes I was lucky. With so much valuable jewellery on her person, I often wondered about her safety, but then, it was not appropriate for me to ask.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the Japanese surrender, the population was at 500,000. In 1949, it reached 2 million.

<sup>2</sup> A Communist college which recruited for the Party in China and Southeast Asia was closed in 1949. Very few schools were closed by the Hong Kong government until 1967, but schools were inspected regularly for "subversive" activities.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Grantham, *Via Port* (Hong Kong, 1965), p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Every five days, each person was allowed one catty and four taels of rice, one catty of flour and half a catty of green peas. 1 catty = 1.32 pounds; 1 tael = 1.33 ounce.

<sup>5</sup> During Father's term as rice controller, he became very good friends with Ma Luchen, an overseas Chinese in Thailand, frequently called the "rice king" of Southeast Asia. After that time, the Ma family sent us bags of Thai rice, pomelos and mangoes every year until my mother's death in 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Reported in *Wah Kiu Yat Po* between 1946 and 1948.

<sup>7</sup> C.T. Wu expressed the opinion that anybody else who had that post would have made a fortune, but Father would not even think of a profit for himself. Interview

with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>9</sup> In 1963 Sing Sheng renewed his relationship with my family when he was offered a position as director of sales and marketing for the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong. He married Dorothy's sister, Grace.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Sing Sheng from Hong Kong, October 14, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> What I as a child remember most was the fact that Mrs. Chan, besides being a skilled lawyer, could knit a sweater in a day!

<sup>12</sup> When we bought our first launch in 1947, the *Swan*, one of the crew members, Ah Gun, was scrawny and looked as though he had been affected by parasites. Father treated him with worm medicine. Over the years he worked for us he actually grew taller and became much healthier.

<sup>13</sup> Doctors with non-Commonwealth training were not allowed to practise in Hong Kong.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, June 2, 1953.

<sup>15</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, July 2, 7, 12, 23, 1951; August 9, 1951; November 5, 1951; February 23, 1952; April 1, 15, 27, 1952; June 16, 1952; July 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 29, 1952; January 10, 16, 1953; March 15, 31, 1953; May 10, 17, 31, 1953.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, March 23, 1961.

<sup>17</sup> In 1941, one-quarter of the work-force in Hong Kong was already engaged in industrial manufacturing.

<sup>18</sup> They formed a sisterhood, *zei mui*, and depended on one another for moral and sometimes financial support. They were known as women who put their hair up, *saw hai*, meaning they would never marry. They braided their hair in the back in one thick braid, and it was never cut. The older women sometimes wore their hair in a bun. I was always fascinated by the amount of hair these servants had, and loved watching them going through the ritual of hair washing, using a certain type of wood shaving, *pao far*, which they bought from the market, and which added a lovely sheen to the hair.

## CHAPTER 17

### The Magical Years

**F**rom the end of the war to the early 1950s, my family lived in the Lee Building. Those were magical years for me. There were so many children living in the same building that we were never short of playmates. I loved the freedom to play in the garden, swinging on tree branches, picking fruit, and, in the spring, chasing little chicks in the chicken coop and catching tadpoles with our handkerchiefs in the fountains where the family kept many goldfish. I constantly had scraped knees and my legs were dotted with mosquito bites in the summer. I loved the beautiful fragrance of the flowering trees and bushes. Mother used to pick the flowers to put in her hair or thread them through to make a loop to hang on the button of her cheongsam. Whenever I hear the sound of heat bugs buzzing now, or smell the fragrance of Chinese jasmine, I am reminded of my childhood in our garden, a carefree time full of fun.

We lived on one side of the top floor of the Lee Building, with Second Uncle's family on the other side. Looking out of our living-room window we could see the side of the hill where there were waterfalls. One of the waterfalls flowed into a rock formation that resembled a pool; in the summer, street children would swim and play there. We were not allowed to go there, but I loved watching them from our window.

The Big House was connected to the Lee Building by a series of gardens on different levels. The grounds were so large that we could have what seemed like a new adventure every day. We had many fruit trees in our garden, such as papaya, loogan, guava, loquat, mango, wongpei and leichée, many planted during Grandfather's time. As children, we loved picking fresh fruit off the trees. In the case of papaya, because the trees were usually too high and too straight to climb, we would knock a ripe papaya off with a stick and catch it in an old raincoat. We would open it up and eat it right there in the garden. We played on the swing and the slide, rode our bicycles around the gardens, and walked on stilts that Sec-

ond Uncle had made for us. I could even walk up and down the stairs on stilts!

The older children would play basketball in the basketball court. In the summer we would catch heat bugs and dragonflies. One type of tree bug we caught had a long snout to which we tied a thread, and when they flew, they were like kites. In the evening, at bath time, when the servants were sent to look for us, our favourite place to hide was in one of the artificial caves that Grandfather had built in the garden.

During the Chinese New Year holidays, the gardens became the grounds for us to light firecrackers. Once, I very bravely (and stupidly) held a small bunch of firecrackers in my hand while they went off. The older boys would use metal tubings and put firecrackers in them and fire them like guns. Fortunately, none of us ever got hurt.

We built a little “club-house” with pieces of boards. We had small wooden benches and stools, and, most importantly, a little coal burner. Every Saturday night, all the children would get together to tell stories and roast sweet potatoes on the burner. I remember once Grandmother had her cook make a soya sauce chicken and bring it to us in the “club-house” because my sister had told Grandmother that she had come first in her class, and that we deserved something for our Saturday night “club.” Being the youngest in the group, I was mainly a listener and observer. We were allowed to stay up as late as we liked. I was so pleased that I was allowed to join this group even though I was always frightened by the ghost stories the older children told. At the end of the evening, without fail, everyone ran upstairs calling out, “Ghosts chasing us!” I was always the last to reach the top of the stairs because I could not run as fast as the others.

One night, I woke up and saw a white shadow with long hair moving from our bathroom to the bedroom. The first thought that came to mind was what Mother had said: “No one died in the Lee Building during the war.” I thought, if there had been no violent death in the building, we would not be harmed by ghosts.

Another night, I woke up and saw a white shadowy female figure with long hair standing between my bed and my sister’s bed. I thought it had to be the servant, but when I sat up in bed to check and saw her fast asleep on her cot at the end of my bed, I froze. I couldn’t even cry out.



The white figure moved closer and closer, then turned towards my sister's bed and fingered the mosquito net with her long nails. I kept saying to myself that she was not going to hurt us since we had never hurt anyone; then I passed out or went back to sleep. The next morning, I asked the servant whether she had gotten up in the middle of the night to adjust my sister's mosquito net and she said, "No." I never told my parents about this because I didn't want to worry them. To this day, I can't explain what I saw, but I remember those images very clearly.

Even though we lived on the side of a hill and were surrounded by trees full of birds, Father loved having birds in our home. We had a beautiful white parrot with a yellow beak, and a couple of canaries. Father would give them water, bird seed and dried squid cartilage when he got home from work. The cages hung on our balcony and sometimes wild canaries were attracted to them. Father enjoyed hearing the birds sing, early in the morning as well as in the evening. There were also blackbirds which flew to our kitchen window, and our cook always fed them.

There were many hungry people in Hong Kong during the postwar years, many of them refugees from China. When they came around to the kitchen which was at the back of the building, our cook would give them leftover food. Very early one morning, I was awakened by the sound of Father shouting from the window. When I went to the window to see what was happening, I saw a man carrying two chickens, one under each arm, and running down the slope from the Lee Building towards Wan Chai. Apparently, he had climbed into our garden and gotten into our chicken coop. Father saw him just as he was getting away.

There were days when we were visited by men who purchased recyclable and reusable cans and bottles from our cook. These men carried on their shoulders bamboo poles strung with huge baskets on each side. This was the way these men could make some money, and it became the postwar Hong Kong way of recycling.

Occasionally, we went to the Big House to see Grandmother, who always looked solemn and always sat in the same chair. We would sometimes have a chat with the Sikh watchman in the guard house, Nam Singh,<sup>1</sup> who sometimes showed us snakes he had caught that day. Having a Sikh watchman was a tradition started by Grandfather.

It was very easy to drop in on Second Grandmother and Fourth Grandmother, as well as to visit our uncles, aunts and cousins, since we all lived so close together.

On the top floor of the Big House was a special room where our altar to our ancestors was placed, and to which we paid our respects on special occasions. It was here that I found out where our family originated.

Second Grandmother and Fourth Grandmother had altars to Buddha in their prayer rooms. We were often at Second Grandmother's because she was Father's biological mother. I was fascinated by her serenity and her faith. I also loved to watch her smoke her water-pipe. She would stuff tobacco into an opening in her beautiful cloisonné pipe, which was filled with water. Then she would light a long paper stick and hold it to the tobacco; when she inhaled, the smoke would be drawn through the water, making a gurgling sound, and puffs of smoke would come out of her mouth. It used to make us laugh. It was one of our favourite entertainments.

At a set time every morning and every afternoon, Second Grandmother would go into her prayer-room, light the incense, put on her prayer robe, made of a coarse dark brown cotton, and kneel in front of the altar to Buddha with her prayer beads in her hands. Different fruits and whatever she was having for dinner that day would be placed on the altar. Then she would recite her prayers, moving the beads with her fingers as if counting them. We used to run in and out of her prayer room while she was chanting and make faces behind her back. She would normally get after us for doing something like that, but she never noticed when she was in prayer.

Even though she had servants, for Chinese New Year, Second Grandmother liked to make steamed cakes herself in the old-fashioned way, on an old Chinese stove in the garden. I used to watch her squatting in front of the stove, blowing on the straws that she fed into the fire. You would think she was still living in a village in China. The steamed cakes would be distributed to her children's families.

On Father's birthday (according to the Chinese lunar calendar), Second Grandmother always made him a village dish of duck cooked with taro, using the same old stove, because she said that was Father's

favourite childhood dish. After she moved from the Lee Building to Caroline Mansion in the 1950s, she had to do this in a more modern kitchen.

Second Grandmother was thankful for what life had given her and I never once heard her complain about anything. She always spoke of Grandfather with great respect, and she would go out of her way to keep harmony in the family. She was a small woman with a strong and resilient character which gained her respect in the family. After Grandmother died, Second Grandmother became the matriarch of the Lee family.

In 1947, since my sister was a boarder at the Diocesan Girls' School and thrived there, my parents decided that they were going to enroll me as a boarder as well. My stay didn't last very long. Not only did I have nightmares, I also cried every Sunday afternoon when it was time to go back to school for the week. My parents finally gave up and enrolled me in grade three at St. Paul's Co-educational College, which was a day school.

Father was an early riser, unlike Mother, who liked to sleep in, so we always had breakfast with him. The first things he put in front of us were cod-liver oil, a thick brown liquid that we took with a tablespoon, as well as vitamin C, and calcium. He made sure we had a full breakfast. He retained the English habit of having bacon and eggs, or kippered herring. I used to like a piece of pan-fried fish if the cook could get it in time in the market.

Father was always in a good mood in the morning. That was his best time of the day. Since both my younger brother and I were in day school, Father drove us every morning even though classes started at eight o'clock. He wanted to get to the office before everyone else anyway, including the office boy. I asked him once why he didn't have the chauffeur drive us, and he said, "I don't want Ah Muk to have to get up so early since he lives in Kowloon. He can get the car from me at the office, and come back to drive Mommy." But he actually liked driving us to school. Along the way, he would pick up the daughter of Grandmother's cook, who was attending another school which was on the same route. Other times, we would also give rides to my school friends.

My childhood image of Father was that of an old-fashioned, stern man upon whom we could always depend, and one who commanded a great deal of respect from everyone. I was a quiet child who listened and absorbed everything around me. I don't believe Father knew how much

I admired him. I was but a few years old when I realized that I was as strong-willed as he was, a quality he came to accept in me. I remember an incident when I was about five years old when he insisted that I should finish my lunch. I was not hungry and refused. Since I was not allowed to leave the table until I finished, I sat there for hours until he relented. From that time on, he knew I always made my own decisions.

As a child, I would rather listen than talk. We usually spoke Cantonese at home, but during dinner time, my parents always spoke English to each other so that the servant attending us would not understand what they were saying. In order for me to understand what was said, I had to learn very quickly. That was how I learnt English, by listening. I could understand the language long before I could speak it. It was also around this time that I was made aware that I was an inquisitive child, for Mother complained that if she told me about a person, I would always want to know everything, including what the person's intestines look like.

I used to have to fill in forms at school. At first I would write "engineer" under Father's occupation, but then I thought this couldn't be right because he seemed to do so many different things, and I knew he didn't make a living as an engineer. I decided to ask him one day what I should put as "father's occupation." He was involved with so many businesses that he took a minute to think, and then he said, "Just put director of companies."

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The first couple of years right after the war, we used to go swimming in South Bay in the summer. The weather was so hot and humid that we sometimes developed boils on our bodies; Father told us that the sea water was very good for our boils. Whenever we went to South Bay, the winding roads reminded me of the rides on top of the Bank of China transport trucks during the war. Invariably, I would be carsick, and Father would have to make frequent stops. He once thought of having our house built on the south side of the Hong Kong island, but then he worried about the isolation and the lack of public security during those years, and he changed his mind. In 1946, I could sense something new was going to happen to our family, and in May 1947, my younger brother, Christopher, was born.

Father believed in fresh air and sunshine. In 1947, as soon as he could afford it, he bought our first launch which we called the *Swan*. It was the smallest of the four launches he owned in his lifetime. The other three were the *Mayflower*, the *Fortuna* and the *Atalanta*.

Boating became a part of our lives, and I loved it. On weekends, Father would take us out on our launch for picnics, and sometimes we would have dinner in one of the floating restaurants in Aberdeen. Later, Aberdeen Harbour became so polluted that Father would not permit us to eat in any of the restaurants there any more.

We never slept over on our launch in the Hong Kong waters because Father said there were pirates. Nevertheless, we begged and begged, and one day he agreed, but we ended up staying overnight parked in the typhoon shelter in Causeway Bay! That night, our sailors hung a light over the water for us to attract cuttlefish; we netted them and brought them back to Mother who was at home with the new baby.

We used to have spectacular sunsets in Hong Kong, particularly in the summer. That was before Hong Kong became overcrowded and polluted. I always observed the sunsets when we returned from a launch picnic, and put the colours of the sky and the shapes of the clouds to memory. Often, at the end of a long day out on the water, I would fall asleep in the car before we got home. Father would carry me and tuck me in bed. The next morning when I got up, I would get out my water-colours and paint the sunset from the night before. I painted long before I learnt to read. Father loved my paintings and my appreciation of the beauty of nature.

Spending time on the launch was the only recreation Father enjoyed, and some of our best family times were out on the water or on one of the off-islands in Hong Kong, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. In the summer, we often invited relatives or my school friends – I was the most gregarious of the four children. My parents rarely used the launch for entertaining, especially when we were young.

Father was one of the very first people in Hong Kong to own a launch, so we were able to go to many unspoiled beaches on the islands around Hong Kong. Those were the days when the beaches were so clean that we could dig clams to bring home to eat. We could observe sea life not normally accessible to city dwellers. I touched a baby octopus, watched a



baby sole flapping in shallow water, saw seahorses swim near our launch, and caught transparent shrimps with a handkerchief. We learnt the names and habits of many sea creatures from our crew, all of whom were *Tankar* people, who lived their whole lives on boats.

Being a public-spirited person, Father would clean the beaches of broken bottles and sharp rocks with the help of our crew. We were never asked to help because he wanted us to have as much time to play as possible. I taught myself to swim in shallow water. Because of my perforated ear-drum, my head had to stay above water in order to avoid another ear infection. I looked forward to low tides because that was when I could find interesting sea creatures that were normally under water. To this day I still do that whenever I am near the ocean.

In the summer, because of the heat, we usually went out in the afternoon for high tea and sometimes for dinner as well, returning to Hong Kong harbour when all the city lights were reflected on the water. I can still feel the sea breezes on my face and smell the salty air. Those were special moments that I will always treasure. The harbour is no longer the same. Land reclamation has made it narrow and it is crowded with busy boat traffic which makes the water choppy.

In the winter, we would go out on the launch in the morning and have a picnic lunch. After lunch and a short rest, Father would hike with us on the islands where there were villages. We saw rather primitive burial plots and jars where descendants collected the bones of their ancestors. We saw fields of sweet potatoes and vegetables, and crumbling buildings that had been there for hundreds of years when these islands were first inhabited by fishermen and farmers, and those who worked in the plantations of fragrant wood. These villagers were probably their descendants whose way of life had not changed much for generations despite the progress of Hong Kong. We would always return home by late afternoon before it got too cold. Even today, I like going to the off-islands to trek across the hills when we visit Hong Kong in the winter.

Throughout the year, when we were on one of the off-islands, we would see fishing boats coming back to shore late in the day. Once, when we were on the beach, a fisherman asked Father whether he wanted to buy some scallops shaped like half-open fans. He then opened one and, to

my surprise, there were little pearls in it. The fisherman told us that they scraped these from the bottom of the ocean for the pearls as much as for the flesh of the scallops. I was disappointed that Father didn't buy any.

We children loved fishing with lines and often caught many colourful small fish. We asked our crew many questions about the different types of fish we caught and learnt about marine life. At times, a fishing sampan would come up to our launch, and we would be shown whatever fish the *Tankar* family had caught, which was kept in the hold of their boat; my parents might choose one or two that we would take home to cook for dinner.

By the middle of the 1950s, we had our third launch, *Fortuna*. It was my favourite because it was so big that we were able to have large picnics with our friends and cousins, uncles and aunts. I often invited my school friends, who, to this day, still talk about our launch picnics. We kept our crew busy looking after us, including watching over those of us who were swimming, in order to warn us in case a jelly-fish should surface. Once, a cousin was touched by the yellow tentacles of a blue jelly-fish just as he was climbing up the swim ladder. He had to be taken to the hospital immediately.

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My parents entertained a great deal. With Father's involvement with the Hong Kong government and with many businesses, Mother was kept very busy being a hostess. In 1948 and 1949, Father was Hong Kong's delegate at the fourth and fifth sessions of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East. By the beginning of the 1950s, he was on numerous government commissions, as well as being a member of the Urban Council.

For as long as we lived in the Lee Building, my parents entertained in the Big House. I remember them getting dressed up and walking down through the garden. These were catered parties, but Mother had to supervise the menus, the flowers, the guest lists and the seating. My parents' parties were known to start early and end early. Father was famous for saying, "When the guests leave, the host will regain tranquillity."

Until the beginning of the 1950s, the Big House was the focal point of our lives. All family gatherings, Christmas parties and wedding par-

ties were held in the main hall. On the first day of Chinese New Year, all members of the Lee family gathered at the Big House to pay our respects to Grandmother. My sister and I would put on our new padded red silk cheongsams (always red for good luck), little gold rings and bracelets. Father and all the uncles would wear the traditional Chinese formal wear for men, dark blue silk cheongsam and black silk jackets; Mother and all the other daughters-in-law would wear their traditional wedding dresses in red and gold, covered in embroidery.

On the second day of New Year, we would go over to Kowloon to pay our respects to our Wong grandparents. Since they were not traditional, the dress code was much more relaxed. However, my sister and I always wore the same red cheongsams as the day before because they were our new dresses for New Year. Every dress I had as a child was red or pink, because these are good-luck colours for the Chinese. I got so sick of red and pink that it took me almost forty years to wear pink again. I still don't wear red.

The empty apartment below us in the Lee Building was occasionally occupied by Grandmother Wong when she visited us. Our Wong grandparents lived in Kowloon, and crossing the harbour was not so convenient until the cross-harbour tunnel was built in the 1960s. One day, when I came home from school. Grandmother Wong had just returned from the Lee Theatre after seeing a war movie starring Errol Flynn. She had a headache and asked one of the servants to get her an ice bag from us. By the time the servant brought it down to her, she had passed away. She had had a stroke; she was in her sixties. It was my first encounter with death in the family. I always remember her as a beautiful and gentle person.

It was customary for well-to-do families at that time to have many servants — a cook, a laundry *amah*, a baby *amah* for each child, and one or two servants for general housework, besides gardeners and chauffeurs. Second Grandmother also had a *muitsai* in her household. In China, when a father was poor and had no way of supporting his children, he would give away his young daughter to a wealthy household to become a *muitsai*. In keeping with old Chinese tradition, money was paid to the parents. Sons were never given away. The household that took in a *muitsai* was supposed to have her as a general helper and, in return, she received her board and lodging, and learned to do household work. This was not always the case, and there were frequent abuses of the system.

When a *muitsai* grew up, it was the duty of the family to marry her off. In my Second Grandmother's case, her *muitsai* was her masseuse, who also performed light household chores.

Even though Father was against the *muitsai* system, he did not interfere until after the Second World War. Then he told his mother that her *muitsai* had to go. Whether Second Grandmother married her off, I really don't know, but I suspect she was sent back home, because I remember her being a rather young girl. In my own home, no one ever worked without pay, so I didn't know about this custom until later. I merely thought the servant was called *muitsai* because she was so young; *muitsai* literally means "little girl."

One day after school, I met a *muitsai* of friends of my parents, who came to our home to say good-bye, because she was to be married to someone in the United States. She was telling Mother about the English lessons she was taking in preparation for her new life. By listening and asking questions, I began to understand this Chinese custom.

Father was always concerned about the well-being of others, and he always had time to help people from all walks of life. What I noticed every day was his consideration for our servants. Never was there an unkind word. He always helped them to improve their lives, even though it meant that we would lose them from our service.

We had a servant called Ah Nam, who was hired to look after my baby brother, Christopher. One day she was spitting blood and was so distraught she wanted to kill herself. Mother took her to the doctor and found out that she had tuberculosis. She was hospitalized and went through lengthy treatment which was paid for by Father. She never worked as a servant again, but when she was better, she got married and had a family. When the Lee family built Caroline Mansion (Yun Ping Road) in the early 1950s, she went to see Father because she wanted to have a small retail business. Father gave her a space, a stairwell that had a lot of walk-by traffic, to sell slippers and magazines. She did well and prospered. She always insisted on giving all of us her merchandise, but because she wouldn't take any money, we told her that we didn't read the type of magazines she sold. She insisted, however, that we could always use slippers, and she would press these into our hands. The last time I saw her was when Mother moved from Tower Court after Father died in 1983.



Tower Court was just a few steps from Caroline Mansion where Ah Nam had her stand.

After we moved in 1951 into Embassy Court, the first high-rise owned by the Lee family, we had a house-boy called Ah Mun, who Father thought was too smart to remain in that position. Father felt that he should have an education to better himself, so he sent Ah Mun to night school to learn English, and later to learn drafting. Often, dinner parties were planned around Ah Mun's school examinations. He sometimes had to miss a class if my parents really needed him to help serve. I remember him looking very smart dressed for school in a jacket and tie given to him by Father. Ah Mun sometimes practised his English by reading Mother's recipe books, and he learned to bake a very good orange chiffon cake. Once Ah Mun completed his drafting course, he left our home to seek better employment.

On one of our trips back to Hong Kong in the late 1960s, I met the new cook, Ah Wu. She had been a cleaner at Tower Court, the building in which we lived. Father had noticed that she was a hard worker, and he offered her a job in our home so that she could learn cooking. Ah Wu stayed with us for many years, and she is like family to me as well as to our children. Over the years, Father helped her and her husband buy an apartment so that they would have financial security. Ah Wu's employment had interruptions because of differences with Mother, but she always came back. In fact, after Father died, and after she retired, out of gratitude to Father, she came back to help Mother near the end of Mother's life. The last time I saw her was at Mother's memorial service in October 1996.

Despite the fact that Father was considered a wealthy man, he never carried more than a few dollars in his pocket. His secretary in the 1970s and early 1980s, Anna, said that it would be a waste of time picking his pocket. This could sometimes be an inconvenience. Anna told me of an incident when Father saw a street hawker in front of one of our office buildings, One Hysan Avenue. He wanted to buy some pears from the man but didn't have enough cash on him, so he went upstairs to his office, and asked Anna to buy some for him. Anna sent an office boy, who said to the hawker, "The big boss, Mr. Lee, sends me." The hawker, frightened because he should not have been selling in front of our building, said, "I'm leaving right away." When the office boy assured him that Mr. Lee



only wanted to buy some pears, the hawker immediately offered them for free. It was Father's policy never to accept anything for free, so the office boy paid ten dollars. But instead of the usual eight pears for ten dollars, the hawker gave him twenty pears.<sup>2</sup> Father, totally unaware of the price of pears, thought it a good deal.

By the beginning of the 1950s, all the refugee families who stayed with us in the Lee Building had gone their own way, and my parents were planning our new home in the penthouse of Embassy Court, on Hysan Avenue, which was the first high-rise owned by the Lee family.

I still remember the architectural plans Father brought home. These were drawings of a two-level penthouse, with the entire roof as our garden. Mother was very much involved in the planning and the décor. My parents would spend time in the side streets of Hong Kong looking for interesting artifacts and antiques. It was an exciting time for them. From then on, they would be able to entertain at home instead of in the Big House.

Because of the problem of water shortage in Hong Kong, the building was designed with large water-storage tanks on the roof; when water was available, it would be piped to the tanks first in order that no one in the building would suffer from the lack of water pressure. This type of design continued with our subsequent buildings. I was aware of Father's concern, not only for us, but for all of the tenants. Father had always been proud of all the Lee family buildings because they were built so well that they would never budge when typhoons hit Hong Kong, unlike many other high-rises that used to collapse in high winds or torrential rains.

My life changed dramatically after our move to Embassy Court. Father continued to drive us and pick up my friends along the way to school every morning. I lost the big garden to play in and became a serious student. Like most students in Hong Kong, I had a tutor. Miss Chan would come after school and teach me mathematics. I had a system worked out to get a high average. It was almost impossible to get a grade higher than 80 percent in any subject except mathematics, because of the way examinations were marked. So the only way to raise one's average was to try to get 100 percent in all three mathematics subjects.

The first year I entered secondary school, I came first in a class of forty students. Actually Miss Chan should have been given the credit. When Mother heard the news from my principal, Miss Bobby Kotewall,

she was so excited she couldn't sleep. It was generally known that St. Paul's Co-educational College had high academic standards, and to come first was extremely difficult. One of my teachers said to me the following year, "For someone with your family background, I don't understand why you work so hard!" People have been saying that to me ever since.

My parents were so pleased that they gave a luncheon for all my teachers. Subsequently, my art teacher presented my parents with a large Chinese painting he had done of white peach blossoms on a pale blue background, which complemented the pale blue décor of our dining room. This painting was treasured by my parents and remained hanging in their dining room until Mother passed away, at which time I inherited it.

Once we moved into Embassy Court, I started Chinese painting lessons with a well-known artist, Boa Siu Yao, who lived not far from us. I used to walk there after school and, during the summer holidays, I went there every morning from Monday to Friday. I also took piano lessons and singing lessons. The singing lessons only lasted about a year because I soon found out that my voice was not strong enough, even though I love singing.

Painting has remained my favourite hobby. I was kept so busy in my early teens that I wasn't even interested in going out with my friends. I had a painting table in my bedroom, quite separate from my desk so that my paints and papers never had to be put away when I did my school work. (In the 1970s, Father came across some of my paintings and sent them to me in Toronto.)

In order for the Lee family to develop the land at the Lee Gardens, the hill had to be levelled. During the few years we lived in Embassy Court, I saw the hill, which was opposite us, gradually levelled right before my eyes. I saw men and women carrying heavy loads of rocks and soil from the hill to the trucks, which were then driven to a dump site. Occasionally, I would hear dynamite going off to break up the rocks. During that process, beautiful rock crystals were found. Father treasured these, and had carved wood stands made for some of the large pieces. He kept some himself and gave some away to the universities.

Many interesting events occurred during the excavation of the Lee Gardens. A Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin) statue was found buried in the hill. It was said that anyone who dared to remove it would become ill.

Work halted, and monks and nuns were brought to the site to chant and pray. It was decided that they were the only people who could remove the Goddess of Mercy. On an auspicious day, and with proper respect paid to the goddess, the statue was removed ceremoniously to be housed in one of the Buddhist temples in the New Territories. Work on the levelling of the hill resumed.

During the excavation, a large iron bell was unearthed, dating back over two hundred years. It had been donated by the Lo family to a temple on the hill in gratitude for their good fortune. "Favourable weather" was inscribed on the bell, referring to the Lo family as farmers. This was a treasure Father was very proud of. He had a beautiful large carved wood frame made to hold this bell which weighed tons. It became his prized show-piece in our living room.

Living in Embassy Court meant that I got to see how my parents entertained. The upper level of the penthouse was for entertaining, and the bedrooms were all downstairs. Whenever my parents entertained, they had a Chinese restaurant do the catering. Catering in those days meant moving all the equipment to our entertainment kitchen upstairs (for everyday, our cook used the kitchen downstairs), where everything would be cooked.

After school, I liked to see what type of food was being served. If winter melon soup was to be one of the courses on the menu, the vegetables in it would be cut in the most beautiful stylized forms of birds, butterflies or fish. I would also check Mother's floral decorations and decide which one I was going to paint the next day. Just before I went to bed, I would look at the party from behind the Chinese screen. I loved the glitter of the silver candelabras and the crystals, the flickering candlelight, and the sound of talk and laughter. Mother always used the most beautiful Chinese crocheted tablecloths with matching napkins. If the party was Chinese style, there would be three tables of eight. If it was a European-style dinner (although only Chinese food was ever served), it would be a long table of twenty-four. My parents' Jewish friends, who ate only Kosher food, always ate dinner at home before coming to our parties.

During these years I often saw Uncle Quo Wai (Q.W. Lee) and his wife, Aunt Helen, at my parents' parties. Uncle Quo Wai is Father's cousin who worked at the Hang Seng Bank. Father had high regard for this cousin whom he believed had great potential, so he wanted to introduce

him to as many of his friends as possible. Today, Uncle Quo Wai is Sir Q.W. Lee, a prominent Hong Kong citizen. In addition to holding many other titles, he is also the former chairman of the Hang Seng Bank.

Father's habits became well-known to everyone. Besides never going to the movies, he never danced, to Mother's dismay. He would not agree to be on any company board if he had to socialize with movie stars. He never gambled, and mahjong playing was not allowed in our house. Mother had one mahjong game a year on her birthday, when she played with her siblings. Father loved his work, and his only form of relaxation was going out on the launch on Sundays, enjoying nature.

There was a story about father being invited to the opening of the May Flower, a dance hall owned by a business friend. Father abhorred places of that sort and was not going to attend, but Grand-uncle Lee Shu Yuen persuaded him to go with him. The dance hall was on the second floor of a building and could only be reached by an escalator. Apparently Father went up the escalator, turned around and came back down, and considered that as having attended the opening.<sup>3</sup>

After we moved into Embassy Court, the yearly Christmas party would be held at our home. It was a party for immediate family members and they always numbered over a hundred. There were presents for each child and adolescent, and a raffle of a few gifts for the adults. I liked getting involved in the planning of the presents, which included a large number of Japanese toys.

For Christmas 1953 we did not have a party. Instead, my parents took Christopher and me to Bangkok, Thailand. We were invited by Father's friend, the "rice king" Ma Lushen, to travel on one of his merchant ships returning from Hong Kong to Bangkok. It was my first cruise, and it was a wonderful experience. We had private cabins, and dined with the Danish captain and his officers. It was exhilarating to see flying fish sail through the air along the side of the ship.

Early one morning, Father called us to go up on deck so that we could watch as the ship entered the estuary towards Bangkok. The sun was just about to rise, and we saw jungle on both sides. As we approached the city, we saw the silhouettes of temples backlit by an orange sky. Then a red ball rose from behind the temples. It was absolute magic!

We stayed in the Oriental Hotel where we dined outside by the river, with mosquito coils burning under the tables. That was before the hotel

was renovated and the dining room became enclosed. We were invited by the Ma family a few times to their home and to restaurants.

During our visit, I learnt that the young men in Thailand, at the age of eighteen, had to go either into national military service or to a monastery to become a monk for a couple of years. I thought it was a wise policy because it recognized that not all men are warlike.

We were invited to the American Embassy in Bangkok to see *This Is Cinerama*, the first 70-mm, three-projector, three-curved-screen movie. My parents also took us to see orchid farms and rice fields and we went on a river cruise to see how the local Thai people lived.

At the end of our stay in Bangkok, Father thought we were all having such a good time that he wanted to extend the holiday and take us to Singapore. I objected, because examinations would begin the moment school started in January, and I needed to go home to study. Father accepted my reason, and we all returned to Hong Kong.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Chinese his name meant South Star, and he spoke excellent Cantonese.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Father's last secretary, Los Angeles, April 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.



## CHAPTER 18

### **Towards Racial Harmony: The Hong Kong Country Club**

**A**s I have mentioned earlier, when Father returned from England at the age of twenty-two in 1927, he wanted to join the Hong Kong Club (which had been called the Hong Kong British Club until the end of the nineteenth century). He was turned down because he was Chinese. He never forgot it. Years later, when he was invited to join, he declined. As I grew older, I came to understand his feelings.

One day after school in the 1950s, I was introduced to two visitors, Governor Sir Alexander and Lady Grantham. Lady Grantham was a friendly American who told me that I looked just like Father. After they left, Father said, "Don't mention this visit to anyone in school. The Governor of Hong Kong is not supposed to be a guest in a Chinese home." I wondered about the fact that we were, in effect, second-class citizens, in a place we called home.

Father had always felt that Hong Kong society needed a multi-racial club where people from different countries could intermingle. So, soon after the war, Father and some of his friends came together to discuss forming a multi-racial family social club in Hong Kong. Historically, and well into the 1960s, access to social clubs in Hong Kong was restricted by one's race, nationality or religion. The Hong Kong Club, the Chinese Club, the Jewish Recreational Club, the Club Lusitano (Portuguese), the German Club and the American Club kept the different races separate. The exceptions were the cosmopolitan clubs that catered only to sports or special interests.

The formation of a multi-racial club became a labour of love for Father and his friends over a period of fifteen years. In the forefront were Father, his close friend, J.R. Jones (legal adviser to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank), and D.F. Landale (taipan of Jardine Matheson). Landale, who had campaigned unsuccessfully for the Chinese to be admitted to both the Hong Kong Club and the Shek-O Country Club in the late

1940s, provided two hundred dollars to cover the initial expenses of this club.<sup>1</sup> When Landale retired in 1956, his successor, Hugh D.M. Barton, assumed an active role in the formation of the club.

In 1947, Father and J.R. Jones submitted the original plan for the interracial club to D.M. MacDougall, the colonial secretary, and the Hong Kong government was receptive to the idea. A site on Brick Hill was chosen because it was easily accessible to the residents of Hong Kong. Informal talks were held by a group that included Father, D.M. MacDougall and Sir Arthur Morse, chief manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (now known as HSBC), who had been so helpful to Father when Grandfather died. It was estimated that \$1.5 million would be required to build the club, and letters were sent to various consular representatives, heads of banks and representatives of different nationalities, setting out the broad outline of the scheme of the club. In 1948, the government agreed to lease approximately seven and a half acres fronting the sea to the club at an annual rent of \$7,200 for twenty-one years.

A general meeting was called in April 1949, and the name of the new organization was changed from the original International Club to the Hong Kong Country Club. Interestingly, among the fifty-six representatives from the various national communities in the colony were only two Chinese, Father and M.W. Lo. The two confirmed the interest of the Chinese to join once the club was formed. During that year, the club's financial subcommittee was able to obtain pledges of \$2 million from companies and individuals. However, in 1950, development of the club was postponed due to anxiety over the uncertain future of the colony caused by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the subsequent outbreak of the Korean War.<sup>2</sup> In 1952, reservation of the site had to be renegotiated<sup>3</sup> with the Hong Kong government and the new Colonial Secretary, R.J. Nicoll. At that point everything was put on hold.

Until the end of the 1950s, the plans for the Hong Kong Country Club remained unchanged. By May 1958, the acting colonial secretary, E.B. Teesdale, again warned that the site would not be reserved indefinitely. The government wanted a concrete proposal as evidence of a firm commitment from the sponsors to build the club. Unfortunately, at this time, the reaction from the sponsors was discouraging, and it looked as

though the club would not be established.

In January 1959, the government gave the committee a deadline of April 1 for the receipt of a concrete proposal. This called for definite action, so Father and J.R. Jones met with two old friends, Sidney Gordon (an accountant with Lowe, Bingham and Matthews), and Y.K. Kan (a lawyer with Lo and Lo). At this meeting, it was agreed that renewed effort should be put into building a club, particularly since so many refugees had arrived from China, and there was a great need for such a facility.

In May 1959, a General Organizing Committee was formed, consisting of five Chinese representatives, three Britons, two Americans, and one representative each from the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Scandinavian, Swiss and Italian communities. A legation consisting of Hugh Barton, J.R. Jones and Father called on the governor to seek his support. The government confirmed its willingness to lease about five and a quarter acres at the Brick Hill site to the club at an annual ground rent of ten dollars per acre, with a building covenant of \$1 million. Having secured the land, the committee decided to raise the necessary financing by issuing debentures at \$5,000 each. By February 1960, sufficient funds were pledged. When the club was incorporated in December, 420 interest-free debentures had been issued, and the subscribers were accepted as the first members of the club. From then on, good building progress was made under the supervision of architect Eric Cumine, a friend of the Lee family.

In 1962, Father's dream of a multi-racial club for Hong Kong became a reality. Even though the construction was not quite completed, January 29 was chosen for the official opening, since it was thought that the Year of the Ox would be a more propitious year for the club opening than the Year of the Tiger. The Hong Kong Country Club was opened by Chief Justice Sir Michael Hogan, who said it was to be "a place where all nationalities and communities can meet and relax in the pleasant, easy, companionable atmosphere that one is accustomed to find in a club." He continued: "Ideas can be interchanged, views expressed and arguments deployed in an atmosphere conducive to goodwill....I am sure that it will contribute to the future strength and stability of Hong Kong."<sup>4</sup>

When construction was completed in February, the club opened its doors to members. In September, Jerry O'Donnell, a member of the first General Committee, proposed a fashion show for the members, and

Mother and Mrs. Hugh Barton were invited to organize a Ladies' Committee to promote the show. This became the first Entertainments Committee of the Hong Kong Country Club.<sup>5</sup>

Father had always believed that there should be harmony among all races. The Hong Kong Country Club was unique because of the membership structure which was an integral part of the club's philosophy and was written into its Articles of Association. Admission of both ordinary and junior members would be according to a national quota system in order to maintain the truly international character of the club: 10 percent American, 20 percent English, 50 percent Chinese, and 20 percent all other nationalities. However, due to anti-Japanese feelings which still existed in Hong Kong at that time, a special quota had to be created within the last group in order to maintain a truly multi-national character.<sup>6</sup> The chairman of the club was elected yearly. The first chairman was the Honorable Hugh Barton, and Father followed for the term of 1963-64. In 1965, J.R. Jones, Hugh Barton and Father were nominated as honorary life members.<sup>7</sup> In his speech, Dr. Jones said of Father that he had "worked in close co-operation with myself and was on the original Building Committee of the Club. Richard also worked very hard to get the Club on a sound footing and bring the venture to the successful conclusion that we see today."<sup>8</sup>

Since its opening, the Hong Kong Country Club has become a big part of social life for families in Hong Kong. The club was Father's pride and joy, despite the fact that it struggled to be financially profitable during its first fifteen years. We have had many wonderful lunches and dinners there (the dining rooms serve both Chinese and Western foods). Our children have spent many happy hours at the club during our visits to Hong Kong. We love the congenial and unostentatious atmosphere, and it has become a second home away from home for us as well as for many others in Hong Kong.

In the 1970s, when corporate nominee memberships were introduced, the club became financially profitable, and earned enough to embark on a complete renovation and beautification program. The understated and congenial atmosphere, the sports facilities, the swimming pools, the children's playground and the children's programs, the restaurants for casual and formal dining, and the adult social programs made it popular, even though new clubs were being started in Hong Kong at the

time. With the help of professional management, the club blossomed. By the 1980s, companies were lining up to pay \$1 million for a corporate nominee membership. Father was a happy man.

Father certainly made good use of the club. He was well known for his early morning swim there. He would usually arrive around five o'clock, and the pool would be opened especially for him. Whenever we were home visiting from Canada, he would return after his swim in time to have breakfast with us. Even with that kind of schedule, he was still the first person to arrive at the office in the morning.

One morning, on his way to swim, Father was stopped by a policeman for a routine check. He was asked to show his I.D. card, which everyone in Hong Kong was supposed to have. Father had never bothered to get one because most people knew him by sight. I'm sure that if he had been chauffeured in an expensive car instead of driving himself in a Volkswagen Golf, he would never have been stopped. When he returned to the office that morning, he told his secretary about the incident, and asked her to get him a card right away. Although I.D. cards had to be obtained personally, an exception was made for Father.

During the years when he drove to the country club for his morning swim, he used to give rides to poor children who had to walk to school along his route. He got to know a number of them and their parents. One morning, one of the children he usually drove was not there. The child's father was waiting for Father and begged him to help his sick wife. Father took them to the hospital and saw that she was cared for.

Sometimes Father even did business at the pool! In 1972, when Hong Kong Land Company Ltd. wished to take over Dairy Farm, Ice & Cold Storage Company Ltd., Father was asked to help. Dairy Farm's chairman and major shareholder was Sir S.N. Chau, a good friend of Father. Hong Kong Land chairman, Henry Keswick,<sup>9</sup> came looking for Father. Since it was very difficult to get an appointment to see Father in his office, Henry Keswick decided to go early in the morning to the country club to catch Father while he was swimming. He followed Father along the edge of the pool as he swam back and forth, and tried to convince him to help. His persistence paid off, and the takeover was successful. The two companies merged in December 1972.<sup>10</sup> After that, everyone teased Henry Keswick about how nice it was of his Uncle Dick to help him take over Dairy Farm.<sup>11</sup>



NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sue Heady, *The Hong Kong Country Club* (Hong Kong, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In 1950, the United Nations imposed an embargo on shipments from Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> Negotiations were conducted by Father, J.R. Jones, M.W. Lo and G. L. Wilson.

<sup>4</sup> Heady, *The Hong Kong Country Club*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> The membership was extended to Mother after Father died.

<sup>8</sup> Heady, *Hong Kong Country Club*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> He was a nephew of Father's old friend, John Keswick, former head of the Jardine Group.

<sup>10</sup> *Hong Kong Standard*, December 14, 1972.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

## CHAPTER 19

### **The Lee Family: Business Projects**

**R**ebuilding the family business after the war was a slow process. To start with, many of the property records had been lost. Father's first secretary after the war, Violet Kong (who later married one of Father's cousins and became Aunt Violet), used to follow Father to the Land Registry Office to look for the original records. Father's Eighth Uncle (a cousin of Grandfather) worked there and was able to help. However, the work was complicated by the fact that the properties had been registered under different names by Grandfather when he purchased them. Some were under Grandmother's name, others under the names of Lee Hysan Estate Company or Lee Cheuk Yu Tong, the latter being the collective name representing all of Grandfather's descendants.<sup>1</sup>

After the war, many of the buildings were in bad condition. Some of the older buildings were so outdated that they did not even have flush toilets. In the postwar years, landlords were not allowed to raise rents above prewar levels, so most landlords could not afford to repair or upgrade their buildings; some could barely cover their taxes. Some of our old apartments had rented for as little as twenty dollars a month before the war. Then, during the Japanese occupation, some old tenants had gone to China, and others had moved into the empty apartments. There was a prevalence of multiple occupancy and multilayered subletting that further complicated matters. It was difficult to establish who the legal tenants were.<sup>2</sup>

Those who profited from this situation were tenants who paid prewar rents and sublet their apartments at current rates. Businesses that occupied older premises benefited from the 10 to 12 percent rise in prices of products which, unlike rents, were not controlled. The problem of what to do with the prewar buildings was not solved until the mid-1950s. On March 19, 1956, Father was elected chairman of the Hong Kong Association of Property Owners. Since the Lee family owned many prewar prop-

erties, he was able to speak out for landlords in the same predicament. Father appealed to the government to allow rent increases that would be fair to both tenants and landlords.<sup>3</sup>

Our family company, Lee Hysan Estate Company, moved into an old building, Alexander House, in 1946. It was placed under the management of Tsui Gang Bo, who later became Uncle Tsui to us. I particularly remember the creaky floors in the building. Throughout their lives, the Lee brothers always had their offices together. Sometimes I would go there after school to wait for Father to go home, and one of my favourite pastimes was to play with the typewriter. Cousin Hon Chiu remembers how impressed he was that Third Uncle had a window unit air-conditioner in his own office, which was considered very progressive right after the war.

There were two rental offices. One, Lee Cheuk Yu Tong, collected rent from properties belonging to Grandmother. The other, Lee Doong, collected rent for Lee Hysan Estate Company.<sup>4</sup> As cousin Peter Lee told me, for years after the war, everything in the family company was done in the old-fashioned way; agreements and decisions were by word of mouth or recorded on bits of paper that have since been lost. Peter (present chairman of Hysan Development Co.), became the general manager of the Lee Hysan Estate Company in the early 1980s, and he looked for past company documents, such as land title deeds or company meeting minutes or contracts for our buildings, but with little success.<sup>5</sup>

The Lee Theatre, where the family took shelter during the bombing of Hong Kong in December 1941, was back in operation by 1946. International Entertainment was again under general manager Yuen Yaohong and manager Dong Zi Jun. At the end of the war, C.T. Wu was still working with the Overseas Union Bank of Singapore and was about to be sent to the branch in Shanghai, but Father convinced him that he would have a better future with us. So he came back to Hong Kong and became the house manager of the Lee Theatre. The theatre was renovated and a high quality screen, good lighting and comfortable seats were installed.<sup>6</sup>

There was no television in the 1940s, so it was a treat for all the Lee children to go on Sunday mornings to the Lee Theatre to see cartoons and the Three Stooges. Box B, the best box in the theatre, was reserved for the family. We seldom went to other theatres because the Lee Theatre showed some of the best movies in town. I sometimes went to see American fea-

ture films with other family members but, until I was able to understand enough English, they were not very meaningful, except for Tarzan and cowboy movies. Cantonese movies gradually gained popularity, but they were all sad. Most of them were about suffering in the last war. I stopped going to those because I did not believe in crying when I wanted to be entertained. By then, I had noticed that Father never went to movies. He was much more interested in working.

In 1948, International Entertainment was asked to be the distributor in China for the London Film Company. Armed with four blockbusters which had been shown at the Lee Theatre with overwhelming success — *The Thief of Bagdad*, *Lady Hamilton*, *The Four Feathers* and *Elephant Boy* — general manager Yuen Yaohong and house manager C.T. Wu went to Shanghai, but the response was very disappointing. The theatres in Shanghai did not seem to know how popular these movies were in the rest of the world. The two men did not even make enough money on that trip to cover their expenses.<sup>7</sup>

However, while Yuen and Wu were there, they made some important contacts with producer Xia Yunhu and director Cai Chusheng, who wanted to establish good relations with the Lee family, and subsequently sent two films, *Yi Jiang Chun Shui Xiang Dong Liu* (*A River of Spring Water Flowing to the East*) and *Ba Qian Li Lu Yun He Yue* (*Eight Thousand Miles of Cloud and Moon*), to be shown in the Lee Theatre. These very sad movies, which depicted the life of the Chinese during the war and criticized the actions of the Nationalist government in China, became great hits in Hong Kong. Despite their sympathy for the Communists, both producer and director were later killed during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

The performance of Chinese operas in the Lee Theatre was on the decline, despite the fact that, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the most celebrated performances in Cantonese opera from the innovative Sin Fung Ming Company<sup>9</sup> were held there. At the same time, the Lee Theatre became a favourite venue for stage performances from different parts of the world. I especially loved Xavier Cougat and Abby Lane and their troop of Latin American dancers. The theatre also presented magic shows and, later, international beauty contests.

Later, at the end of the 1980s, Fourth Uncle told me about the International Chinese Beauty Contest that had taken place in the theatre that

year. He said, "One of the contestants was from Scarborough, Ontario." I told him that I was one of the judges in the competition held by the Scarborough Chinese Business Association which chose that particular contestant.

The accountant for International Entertainment was Grandfather Wong who worked until he was over eighty years old. Father kept him in that position just so that he would have something to do. He remained very bright into his late eighties and died at the age of ninety-two.<sup>10</sup>

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The main business of the Lee family was in property development, but the perennial problem facing developers in Hong Kong was the lack of flat land. So, in order to erect more buildings, we had to level the Lee Gardens hill and obtain dumping rights from the government. Before the Second World War, a small part of the Lee Gardens hill had been levelled and the soil moved to North Point for landfill. We then purchased that piece of land from the government and built two factories, a nail factory and a paint factory called Duro Paint. The nail factory was sold subsequently to another Chinese manufacturer. Duro Paint was sold to Swire<sup>11</sup> in 1948, and Duro Paint Holding Co.<sup>12</sup> was formed. The Lee Hysan Estate Company was given shares in lieu of payment, and this resulted in the family being one of the largest shareholders of Swire. This was the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship between the family and the Swire Group. Fourth Uncle was a director of Swire Industries, and Third Uncle became a director of Cathay Pacific, also owned by Swire Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

The first postwar real estate development by Lee Hysan Estate Company was the further levelling of the Lee Gardens hill. The Hong Kong government gave permission for dumping in Chai Wan and Aberdeen. Opening up the area also meant building roads. Hysan Avenue, named after Grandfather, became the main avenue; Lan Fong Road, named after Grandmother, was the one behind it. Other streets were named Sunning, Sunwui, Hoiping and Yunping, after the Szeyup counties in China which formed the nucleus of our ancestral and neighbouring villages. Pak Sar



Road was named after Chan Pak Sar (Chen Buosha), a famous scholar in the Ming Dynasty from Sunwui, our ancestral village, and Kai Chiu Road was named after Liang Kai Chiu (Liang Qichao), another famous scholar at the beginning of this century from Sunwui. And, of course, there had to be a Lee Gardens Road. These were all private roads<sup>14</sup> that were subsequently turned over to the government.

In order to finance new buildings, the family sold some of our very old row houses and apartments. The first postwar apartment building put up by the family company was Sunning Court, on the south side of Hysan Avenue. Sunning Court was the first building in Hong Kong that sold apartments outright.<sup>15</sup> It was built in a U-shape, with the bottom of the U facing Hysan Avenue. The part of the building with the frontage on Hysan Avenue was sold to Kwong Lee Enterprises, a company owned jointly by Lee Hysan Estate Co. and the Shanghai Commercial Bank. The company ran a small hotel called Sunning House, with fifty-two rooms. Father was the chairman of Kwong Lee, and its directors were Third Uncle, Tsui Gang Bo, Zhu Rutang and Wang Changlin of the Shanghai Commercial Bank.<sup>16</sup>

Sunning House opened for business in 1949 with C.T. Wu as manager. The Communist takeover of China made it into an instant success. Its connection with the Shanghai Commercial Bank helped bring many of the important Shanghai industrialists who came down to Hong Kong to stay there.<sup>17</sup> It became a landmark and its Champagne Room was the hottest spot in Hong Kong throughout the 1950s. Patrons needed to be properly dressed<sup>18</sup> to dine there, and they danced to the beautiful music of the Three Bubbles, broadcast on Rediffusion<sup>19</sup> every Wednesday night. The Champagne Room was patronized by visiting movie stars, such as Hedy Lamarr, Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, William Holden and Rita Hayworth. A popular night spot for locals and for visitors, it was said that if you had not been to the Champagne Room, you had not been to Hong Kong.<sup>20</sup>

The next major project of the Lee family was Embassy Court on Hysan Avenue. It was the first high-rise owned by the family. When it was completed, my family, Fifth Uncle and his family and Third Grandmother moved into the building. In 1954, the Lee family built two more high-rise buildings, Tower Court and Caroline Mansion, fronting on Hysan Avenue

and Yunping Road respectively, just a few steps away from Embassy Court. When these were completed, the rest of the Lee family who had remained in the Lee Building moved in.

The Lee Building was again rented to outsiders, as it had been in Grandfather's day. It was an unwritten tradition in the Lee family that every member of Grandfather's family — wife, concubines and children — had free accommodation in family-owned buildings, and everyone got to choose where they wanted to live. Because of this tradition, family members tended to live very close to one another. However, this practice does not extend to my generation.

My favourite haunts in the 1950s were the Lee Theatre, the Champagne Room in Sunning House and the soft drinks factory of Spa Foods Company Limited, also owned by the Lee family after the war. As children, we used to visit Spa and watch the bottling process with fascination. We could naturally drink whatever we wanted, as well as bring as much home as we wished.

In 1953, Seventh Uncle came back to Hong Kong after graduating from Boston University. Together with Third Uncle, he bought the majority shares from Spa and formed the General Bottling Company. From then on, the Lee Hysan Estate Company had only a nominal share in Spa. In 1955, General Bottling secured the franchise for Schweppes, and a year later, the franchise for 7-Up, and subsequently a Japanese beer. The children in the family continued to be welcome to visit the factory, and any soft drink that we wanted would be delivered to our homes. Seventh Uncle was extremely successful. He used to ride in the delivery trucks to the chagrin of the locals.<sup>21</sup> I still remember trucks driving up to St. Paul's Co-educational College (the school I attended) during recess, and the staff handing out free 7-Up to the students — a brilliant marketing ploy. Seventh Uncle named 7-Up as Seven Happinesses in Chinese. Because of its lucky name, 7-Up was served at all Chinese celebrations.

By the late 1950s, the Lee Gardens hill was completely flattened. One of the people from our village in China, who was using part of the land for keeping honey-bees, was worried that he would have nowhere to keep his bees once the land was built on, so he went to the Lee brothers to express his concern. He was given permission to carry on his business on a piece of land in Sha Tin which was in the name of Lee Shiu Yuen, Grandfather's young cousin.<sup>22</sup>

The development of the first phase of what was later known as the Lee Gardens Hotel began in 1964. The original plan was to build a residential complex with an office podium. The office portion, consisting of the first six floors, was built and rented mainly to the Medical and Education Departments of the Hong Kong government. The ground floor was let to commercial establishments. However, construction of the residential component was stopped because of the Cultural Revolution in China and the subsequent 1967 riots in Hong Kong. At the end of the 1960s, with the completion of the Cross Harbour tunnel whose exit was nearby, and because of the shortage of hotel rooms in Hong Kong at the time, the family decided that a hotel should be built. A nine hundred-room hotel above the podium was completed at the end of 1971.<sup>23</sup>

The Lee Gardens Hotel was a private company, with Lee Hysan Estate Company as the major shareholder. Some of the other shareholders were Swire Pacific, Hong Kong Bank (HSBC), Hong Kong Land, Tai Cheung Development and A.P. Møller. Swire chairman H.J.C. Browne was invited to be the first chairman of the Lee Gardens Hotel Company.<sup>24</sup> He was followed by Third Uncle. Father was involved in the hotel right from the beginning as a director and, after the sudden death of Third Uncle, Father became chairman. Through his personal connections with China, the original carpets for the hotel lobby were custom-ordered from Tianjin. Because of Father's connection with the Japanese community, tour groups from Japan always stayed at our hotel.

During the 1970s, the Lee Gardens Hotel was one of the few locally managed hotels of international standard. It was initially associated with Forum Hotels, a division of Intercontinental.<sup>25</sup> Over the years, the hotel became the favourite of Asian tourists because of its location in Causeway Bay. The hotel once again put the name Lee Gardens on the map of Hong Kong.

As Mother was getting on in years, it became too much work for her to entertain at home, so my parents entertained almost exclusively at the hotel after it opened. There were several restaurants in the Lee Gardens Hotel, and my parents' favourite was the Chinese restaurant, the Rainbow Room. When they had parties, they would usually reserve a private room (with a round table seating twenty-four guests), or take over the entire restaurant. My parents were very proud of the standard of the cuisine there, and Father always said that the Peking Duck was number one in

Hong Kong, and better than in Beijing. He liked to point out to guests any special dishes introduced from mainland China. Friends from all over the world were invited to the Lee Gardens Rainbow Room.

With the completion of the Lee Gardens Hotel, the entire area of what had been the Lee Gardens was developed. Along Hysan Avenue was planted a row of Bauhinia, which is now the symbol of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Trees with yellow flowers were planted on the side roads. Father pointed them out to me with pride, not only because they were usually in bloom when we visited in the winter, but also because he had imported them specially from south China.

Around the beginning of the 1970s, the Lee brothers decided to abandon their conservative approach to business.<sup>26</sup> Through his friend the Hon. J.D. Clague, Father was introduced to Chan Tak Tai, a developer who had been very successful in the growth of the Chungking Mansion in Kowloon. Chan suggested to Father that the Lee family form joint ventures in the development of two buildings in the Causeway Bay area, One Hysan Avenue and Leighton Centre, with the Lee Hysan Estate Company putting up the land and investors putting up the capital. Chan himself invested a small percentage.<sup>27</sup> In 1970, a private company, Hennessy Development Co. Ltd., was incorporated.

Up to that point, all our postwar buildings had been wholly owned by the family company and built by Lam Woo Construction because of the friendship between the two families. From the beginning of the 1970s on, building plans were sent out for tender. The new approach also demanded fresh blood in the family business. The first person the Lee brothers turned to was the eldest grandson, Hon Chiu. In 1976, while Hon Chiu was working for RCA (Radio Corporation of America) in the United States, Fourth Uncle asked him to return to Hong Kong to help. Hon Chiu was in his forties with a growing family. He agreed to return to Hong Kong, but his wife, Doris, stayed on in the U.S. so that their children could continue their education without interruption.

When Hon Chiu returned to Hong Kong, the family company had just moved into its premises in the newly completed office building, One Hysan Avenue, which Hon Chiu learnt how to manage. Although Third Uncle wanted Hon Chiu to keep an eye on the staff on the twenty-second floor, Father gave him an office on the twenty-first floor with all the uncles, a corner office overlooking the construction of Leighton Centre.<sup>28</sup>



Father gave him the responsibility of overseeing the actual construction of the building, taking over the responsibility Father used to impose on himself during the construction of our former buildings.

Hon Chiu had coffee with Father every day and gave his report, which “must not be longer than fifteen minutes.” Father was an impatient man. He needed to know about progress and, if Hon Chiu ran into any difficulty, Father could usually solve it for him within half an hour because of his extensive connections.<sup>29</sup> Father also suggested that Hon Chiu join the Hong Kong Country Club. It had a long waiting list but, since Father was a founding member, there was no problem for his nephew to join. Father also introduced him to many of his good friends, such as Geoffrey M.T. Yeh and Yao Kang,<sup>30</sup> who turned out to be extremely helpful to him for years to come, and for which he was very grateful.

Every Sunday throughout the year, Father and Hon Chiu would spend the day on our launch (by then, my siblings and I had all left Hong Kong and become residents of other countries). By the late 1970s, Mother had lost interest in the launch and seldom went out with them, but if any of us were in Hong Kong, we loved to go along. Father no longer liked staying out late, so his habit was always to return to Queen’s Pier around four in the afternoon. Father was grooming Hon Chiu for future leadership of the Lee family’s many enterprises.

In 1978, a directive (not an order) was received by Lee Hysan Estate Company from the Hong Kong government to build on our empty land along Hennessy Road. There had never been any rush among the Lee brothers to build on this site.<sup>31</sup> In 1976, Third Uncle had held discussions with Citibank about a joint venture to build an apartment building on the land, but the talks had fallen through. Now the area around it had been built up, but our land remained empty. People in Hong Kong were wondering why the Lee brothers did not develop it since it was so valuable. The truth was that nobody had the time, so no one bothered. Now that nephew Hon Chiu was back in Hong Kong, it became his responsibility to supervise the development of this project, known as Hennessy Centre, on Yee Wo Street, under the company name of Hennessy Development. It was again a joint venture between Lee Hysan Estate Company and investors.

When the foundation of Hennessy Centre was first excavated, Hon Chiu would go to the site every weekday, as well as after the launch



picnic on Sunday. Sometimes Father would go along with him. The excavation dragged on, because the construction crew had trouble reaching bedrock.

The Lee brothers disagreed over the plans for the top and the bottom floors. Fourth Uncle wanted the lower floors built as a theatre for Chinese opera and performances of Chinese music, but this was considered an unprofitable proposition by the rest of the brothers. Finally nephew Hon Chiu had the plans redrawn to the satisfaction of all the uncles. Hon Chiu moved the original car-park from the basement to the lower floors, and the basement became retail space. After many discussions, it was finally agreed that the top two floors would be retained for rental to a private club, and these were taken up by the Japanese Club. It was not unusual for the Lee brothers to disagree over family business, but matters were always settled within the family, and they always presented a united front to the community.<sup>32</sup> The Hennessy Centre was completed in 1981.

The next project was the redevelopment of Sunning Plaza. The property consisted of Sunning House, the small hotel with its main entrance on Hysan Avenue, and Sunning Court behind, which contained more than sixty apartments. Every apartment owner was a shareholder of Associated Property. Presentations were made to the shareholders, and after many questions and various disagreements, votes were taken. Hon Chiu noted that it was the only time in the seventy-four-year history of Lee Hysan Estate Co. Ltd. (founded by Grandfather in January 1924) that votes had to be counted, because of the involvement of so many outside shareholders. In 1980, the Sunning Plaza project started with I.M. Pei as architect.

Due to the fact that the ownership of Leighton Centre, One Hysan Avenue, Hennessy Centre, Sunning Plaza and Sunning Court was split between investors and Lee Hysan Estate Co., in many different shareholding structures, the Lee brothers decided to consolidate and create a public development company. The original Hennessy Development Co. Ltd., which was incorporated in 1970, became Hysan Development Co. Ltd. in 1981,<sup>33</sup> and obtained listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in August, issuing 500 million ordinary shares. Father was the chairman of the company. Hon Chiu and Fourth Uncle formed a committee to take care of details and, every day, Hon Chiu gave Father his progress report over coffee.<sup>34</sup>

Wardley Limited, our merchant banker, advised the family that it would be more attractive to investors of Hysan Development if, in addition to rent collecting, there were other activities, such as buying and selling properties for further developments. Wardley suggested the injection into the Hysan Development Co. of the property known as the Big House and the Lee Building, our ancestral home with its surrounding gardens (74-86 Kennedy Road), which was wholly owned by Lee Hysan Estate Co.<sup>35</sup> Evaluations were done by Jones Lang Wootton. Since Hysan Development did not have the cash to buy the property, the property was exchanged for deferred shares in the company for the family in the amount of \$875 million. When Hysan Development took over the property, it was developed in 1985 into a luxury residential complex known as Bamboo Grove, which consisted of 345 apartments. Again, many family members moved into this new complex, including Mother after Father passed away.

When Hysan Development first went on the market in 1981, its shares were valued at one dollar. From then on, the Hong Kong market started to slump and the shares gradually fell to as low as thirty-nine cents. The talk between Britain and China on the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China caused jitters for investors in Hong Kong properties. Another reason was the death of Chen Tak Tai, one of the big shareholders. His son, David, who held his shares, decided to sell all of them, thus bringing down the value. Both Father, as chairman, and Hon Chiu, as the managing director, had many responsibilities and worries. Father appealed publicly to the shareholders not to sell, reassuring them that the value would go up again. Time proved him right.

One day in the early 1980s, while out on our launch, Father said to Hon Chiu, "If nobody says anything bad about you, you are already doing very well. Don't expect anyone to praise you for what you do." Hon Chiu said that these were some of Father's words of wisdom that he would always remember. After Father passed away in 1983, the chairmanship of Hysan Development went for a few years to Fourth Uncle, who then passed it on to Hon Chiu.<sup>36</sup> Cousin Peter is presently the chairman.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Hong Kong faced a major economic downturn. I remember seeing pessimism everywhere, except in my own family. Father, of course, had never-ending faith in the future of Hong

Kong. From the mid-1980s on, Hysan Development continued to acquire properties for development, not only in Hong Kong, but also in Shanghai and Singapore. The stock market gradually turned around, but Father never lived to see the great prosperity gained by Hong Kong in the early 1990s.

With the development of Caroline Centre, a joint venture between Hang Seng Bank and Hysan Development, the company shares rose to thirty-two dollars in 1994. In 1997, with the Asian economic crisis, there was another down-turn. At present, property companies are again gaining momentum in Hong Kong, and Hysan Development profits are up almost 20 percent.

Hysan Development, controlled by Lee Hysan Estate Co., the oldest Chinese property company in Hong Kong, is highly respected in the business world and is regarded as one of the top ten property companies in Southeast Asia. With its conservative policy and the high-end tenants it attracts, Hysan Development is regarded as a “boutique” property company.<sup>37</sup> Father would have been very proud of its achievements.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, July 31, 1956.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with J.S. Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Peter Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Not long after Yuen and Wu left, Shanghai was taken over by the Communists.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> This company was very highly regarded by both the community and local government.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>11</sup> John Swire & Sons Limited was established in the United Kingdom in 1816. The company established Butterfield & Swire Co. in Shanghai on January 1, 1867, importing cotton and woollen fabrics and exporting tea and silk from China. In 1872, Swire established China Navigation Company (C.N.Co.). After the Second World War, the company's centre of business moved to Hong Kong. In July 1946, Swire and Maclaine Ltd. was established for import/export business. The company established Taikoo Wharf and Godown Company in

June 1947. In 1948, it acquired a majority share of Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. The company is also involved in manufacturing and engineering industries, beverages, properties, insurance, agriculture and retailing.

<sup>12</sup> Registered in Hong Kong on October 19, 1948.

<sup>13</sup> The company was founded in 1948.

<sup>14</sup> One day in the 1950s, after we moved from the Lee Building to Embassy Court on Hysan Avenue, Father was driving me to school. As he was making a turn from Hoiping Road to Hysan Avenue, a man was taking his time crossing the road. Father, being very impatient, said to him, "Hurry up!" The man said, "I can take as long as I want. It's not your road." To which Father replied, "It is my road!"

<sup>15</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, February 1997. It was a major innovation in business practice and land law, the basis of much of Hong Kong's economic growth in subsequent decades.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>17</sup> I am sure its connection with the Shanghai Commercial Bank helped.

<sup>18</sup> I remember a humorous write-up in the newspaper in the mid 1950s about a minister of the church wearing a Roman collar, who was not allowed in because he was not wearing a tie.

<sup>19</sup> It was a wire (cable) commercial service in Hong Kong.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>21</sup> In Hong Kong, bosses do not ride in delivery trucks. Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>22</sup> This was subsequently sold by the family in the 1990s.

<sup>23</sup> Note from Chien Lee, Hong Kong, January 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Note from Chien Lee, Hong Kong, January 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Between 5 and 10 percent. Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, November 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> The Hong Kong stock market crashed in 1973, followed by a worldwide oil crisis, which brought economic recession until 1976.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>33</sup> The company was originally incorporated in October 1970 as a private limited company under the name of Hennessy Development Company Limited, and was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Lee Hysan Estate Co. which was incorporated in 1924.

<sup>34</sup> The original board consisted of Father as the chairman, and directors David P.

Chan, F.K. Hu, Michael Jebsen, Per Jorgensen, T.S. Kwok, Hon Chiu Lee, J.S. Lee, Quo Wai Lee, Ian Robert Anderson and Geoffrey M.T. Yeh.

<sup>35</sup> The total area was 80,881 sq. ft. Grandfather had originally bought this property in the names of Grandmother and his first four sons – Father, Second Uncle, Third Uncle and Fourth Uncle. To the credit of the Lee family, the property was given back to the family company, Lee Hysan Estate Co., for the benefit of all family members. In fact, it was also to the credit of Grandmother who turned over all the properties in her name to all the children during her lifetime.

<sup>36</sup> At the end of 1997, besides many other positions, Hon Chiu Lee was elected chairman of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.



## CHAPTER 20

### A Daughter Grows Up

**B**y 1954, my parents were planning to move from Embassy Court to Tower Court, a new high-rise the Lee family was building on Hysan Avenue. Again we were going to occupy the penthouse, which took up the entire top floor and half of the floor below. We moved in in 1955.

The following year, Grandmother became very ill. When she died in early summer at the age of seventy-six, the Lee family held a traditional Buddhist funeral for her. Her body was kept on ice for forty-nine days in the pagoda by the fountain of Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy) at the Big House. Matsheds built of bamboo and straw matting were erected in the adjacent Bamboo Garden for direct descendants, the men on the right, and the women on the left. Robes of black or white were worn by the descendants who took turns keeping watch over the body. As a grand-daughter, I wore white when I went every day after school. We had very plain rice and vegetables for dinner, and we all ate together in the matshed, sitting with our legs crossed on the raised floor which was covered with woven straw.

During the forty-nine days, groups of monks and nuns were hired to burn incense, chant and pray for her. I believe they were from monasteries of different Buddhist denominations because they wore different types of robes. On the day of the funeral, the procession lasted for hours. Afterwards, we all went back to the Big House and gathered in the main hall. I was told that the soul would leave the body in the form of a bird or a butterfly. As I was standing looking at Grandmother's photograph hanging in the centre of the end wall, I suddenly saw a butterfly perched on the photograph, and then it flew out to the terrace, and was gone.

That night, before we all gathered for dinner, paper objects were burnt on the terrace, a symbol of sending these to Grandmother in the other world. The most important was a paper bridge, without which she could not reach the other side. Other paper objects were in the shape of servants, a big house, gold and silver money and a car. I was watching

with fascination while these objects were being burnt, when Fifth Aunt's husband, Uncle Y.H. Kan, came up to me and said, "I guess Grandmother is going to the United States. The car has a left-hand drive!"

We then gathered for a family dinner in the Big House. I remember Mother and all the aunts had to wear specially made dull-coloured costumes for that particular event, because the body had been buried and the family had entered another stage of mourning.

A few days later, all the sons returned to the Big House after dinner because the spirit would be coming home. They walked around the house and the garden, making sure the spirit knew that they were there. And while they were in the garden, they said to one another jokingly that they had better not relieve themselves since they couldn't see where the spirit was.

The year Grandmother died, Hon Chiu graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and was given a good job offer. He was about to marry an American citizen, Doris, in the United States. The marriage would have allowed him to remain in the U.S. to work. According to Chinese tradition, descendants of the deceased were not allowed to marry during the period of mourning (three years). With his usual good sense, Father put a stop to any objection from the family by saying that whoever objected to the wedding would have to offer Hon Chiu an equally good job in Hong Kong. So Hon Chiu got married and remained in the United States for the next twenty years.

That summer, I turned fifteen, and Father thought it was time for me to go abroad to study. Father had benefited a great deal from his studies and experiences in England, and he believed that what was good for him would be equally good for his children. At the beginning of the 1950s, he had sent my older brother Richard and my sister Deanna to England, but because of my different temperament, Father kept me at home a little longer.

In August 1956, my parents saw me off at Kai Tak airport. That was when Hong Kong was still in the process of building a much-needed new runway, which had been under discussion since the end of the 1940s. The airport at that time was very small and quite primitive. There was only one doorway for arrivals and departures.<sup>1</sup>

My sister and a family friend, David K.P. Li,<sup>2</sup> were on the same flight as they were returning to England after their summer holidays. It was my

first time away from home. I had heard of London fog, but never quite knew what to expect until our plane touched down in London.

It was in the evening, and I couldn't see anything. In addition, I was choking on yellow smog. We were met by Uncle Ley On, Father's old friend, with his Bentley, driven by his Burmese chauffeur, Ah Ong. My sister and I stayed for a few days with him and his wife, Aunt Betsy, in their lovely house with a beautiful garden in Surrey, outside London. It was in Uncle Ley On's restaurant that I first came across the Chinese dish called chop suey. I wanted to know what it was, so I ordered it, but the waiter wouldn't give it to me. He said that it was not for the Chinese; it was just a name for left-overs.

Between 1956 and 1958, I attended Upper Chine School in Shanklin, on the Isle of Wight in southern England. I was sent there to join my sister Deanna. The total number of students in this exclusive private girls' school was just over two hundred, from Grade One to Upper Six (Grade Thirteen). Most of the teachers were excellent, and the more advanced students were put into special classes. My smallest class was in mathematics; it consisted of two students – myself and a girl from Thailand.

Upper Chine was situated on the upper part of the Chine River, which was more a brook than a river. The school grounds, maintained by ten full-time gardeners, were very beautiful. During the summer holidays, the grounds were open to the public. In the spring, daffodils adorned the river-banks. During the summer term, on a warm and sunny day, we would sometimes have our classes in the garden under a big tree. Roses bloomed throughout spring, summer and fall. But in the winter, everything was grey, cold and miserable.

When I attended Upper Chine, I skipped a year from Form Three (Grade Nine) to Form Five (Grade Eleven). Since I was expected to go to Oxford, I had to take six "O" (Ordinary) level examinations at one time. I wrote the examinations in my first year there, as well as the "A" (Advanced) level in Chinese. My parents were very pleased with my academic progress because I came first in my class consistently, but I was not happy.

What bothered me was not the academic work but the British public-school system. For a person like me who is independent, disciplined and had an artistic flair, the system just didn't work. I hated to be told what to do at what time and on what day. I needed time and space of my own

and that was not possible when six to eight girls shared a room. To have a table to paint water colours was out of the question. Lights had to be out at a prescribed time at night. We were told when to eat, when to sleep, when to write our parents, when to bathe (three times a week; the weekend was free, so I managed to bathe five times a week instead of daily as I used to do at home), and almost when to breathe — that was when we were supposed to go outside for recess no matter how cold it was (we did not have thick winter coats as part of our uniforms). In the afternoon, we were supposed to do sports — field hockey. Since I disliked field hockey, I always went for walks with some of the girls from the Middle Eastern countries who would rather take walks as well.

I was always hungry and cold because the school diet was unbalanced and there was no heating. We slept with the windows open even in the winter with snow flying in. I had layers of clothing, nine blankets on top and a hot-water bottle at my feet. Fearing that I didn't have enough fresh fruit in my diet, Father arranged for me to have two apples every day which I picked up in the kitchen during recess. And knowing that I was always hungry, he arranged to have Cadbury send me boxes of chocolate bars and biscuits every term. But any food sent to the students could only be consumed on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Those were the only years in my life when I suddenly put on a lot of weight, and I had chilblains on my fingers and toes.

Being used to attending a co-educational school where boys and girls competed, I found the environment of an all-girls school very artificial. No matter how well I did academically or how much I liked my teachers, I didn't feel that I belonged there.

Mother came to visit us in England in the spring of 1957. She first went to see my older brother, Richard, who was in school in Nottingham. When she saw him, she felt something was wrong; he was showing signs of mental illness that no one in the school seemed to have noticed. She asked to have him seen by a psychiatrist and, from then on, my parents' lives were never the same again.

Since mental illness was something my parents could not cope with, they seldom talked about it. As a result, I knew little about my brother's condition. During my second year at Upper Chine, Richard was hospitalized outside London. That year, I made a Christmas cake in my domestic science class, the only Christmas cake I've ever made in my life. During



the holidays, I went with an aunt, then living in England, to take the cake to him. I felt that our childhood closeness was starting to come apart. His condition sometimes improved, and he had some good years, but his illness often caused him to stay away from family members. Only a number of years later did I learn that his condition was schizophrenia, which strikes about one person in a hundred, and which usually manifests itself in the late teens or early twenties.

During my second year at Upper Chine, I wrote my parents to say that I was leaving at the end of that year, and that I would finish my last year of high school at St. Paul's Co-educational College. I didn't ask for permission and didn't list the reasons why, because I didn't want my parents to try to dissuade me. It wouldn't have worked anyway. I was a wilful child. Father was very disappointed because he believed in the English public-school system. To most people it was almost an admission of failure. However, that year, I came first again in my class. Besides adding many more "O" levels to my credit, I also passed the "O-A" level in mathematics with high marks.

I went home to Hong Kong in the summer of 1958 and was readmitted to St. Paul's. Father had very little to say to me at first, because he was still upset by my leaving England. I guess he also knew that I didn't intend to return to England for university as he had originally hoped. The direction in my life had also changed. I decided that I didn't want to study mathematics as my teachers at Upper Chine had recommended.<sup>3</sup> Instead I wanted to study arts subjects and take history at university. Because of my change of direction and also the change of school system, I had to do two years' work in one in order to write my matriculation examinations. I borrowed notes from my old school friends to catch up, but the results were not as good as before.

When I returned to Hong Kong, I was determined to get through two years' work in one. I used to study long hours in our roof garden. My only recreation was painting (I started painting faces instead of birds and flowers as before), and going out on the launch with my parents. By now the launch was the *Atalanta*, smaller than the *Fortuna*. My younger brother, Christopher, was the only other child left at home. Our last coxswain, Ho Ning, came to work for us then, and remained with us for over twenty years. My parents no longer wanted large groups of guests on our launch picnics, especially when I wasn't interested in doing the inviting.



This was also the year that I asked my parents not to call me “May” any more, and to call me by my first given name, Vivienne, the name I always used in school. Mother said, “We call you May because you were mai mai (little sister). It is a little late for us to make the change now, but when you go to Canada, no one knows that we call you May, and people will only know you as Vivienne.” I was growing up, and would make many more decisions for myself.

In 1958, my sister entered Oxford to study medicine, and Sixth Uncle returned from the United States after getting his Ph.D. at Princeton. He suggested that, since I didn’t want to return to England, I should apply to universities in the United States. Father put a stop to that. He said that no child of his would be educated in the United States. I should have asked him at that time why he was so anti-American. I applied to two Canadian universities, McGill University in Montreal and the University of Toronto. It was Father who decided that I should go to McGill because it was well known outside Canada.

In the fall of 1959, I was entering McGill as a sophomore (at that time McGill accepted students into first year after Grade 12). In August, Mother and I flew to Canada. As usual, Father made all the travel arrangements. We went first to the west coast, then to the Rockies. Mother’s cousin, Ethel, and her husband, Bill Poy, invited us to stay with them in Ottawa. Bill and his son, Neville, came to meet us at the Toronto airport. We stayed in Toronto and visited Niagara Falls, then drove to Ottawa for a few days. From there, Mother and I flew to Montreal. Once I was settled in residence at McGill University, Mother left for New York, and went home via England, where she visited my older brother and sister.

The years at McGill were wonderful, but I spent too little time studying, and too much time with Neville, who was in his final year of medical school the year I arrived. As a result, I didn’t do as well as I should have academically. My priorities were different then. Mother wasn’t happy because she had other plans for me, but Father was not opposed to my going out with Neville because he always appreciated capable and intelligent people.

In 1961, Neville wrote to Father to ask for my hand in marriage. Father thought it was rather premature since I was still in university. Later that year, I wrote to my parents to tell them that I was getting married the following year when I graduated and turned twenty-one. My parents had

always known me to be headstrong but sensible. Father approved of Neville, but Mother was so upset that she did not speak to me for years. She wondered why I had chosen a "poor boy." Knowing that love or happiness cannot be bought, I disagreed with Mother. In the short twenty years of my life, I had met many miserable, wealthy people, and I wanted to be sure that I was not going to join their number. As Neville himself said, he had no assets except for his training and abilities, and that was good enough for me. Besides, I was going to marry the man I loved, and Father understood that.

Since Mother was having nothing to do with my wedding, I had to look after all the arrangements myself, while studying for my final examinations. Neville and I also had to find a place to live. I wanted the graduation and wedding to be timed close together to make it easy for Father to be present for both occasions. In the space of two weeks, I had my twenty-first birthday, my graduation and our wedding! Right after the convocation, Father asked me why I had only graduated with honours and not first-class honours. He did not realize what stress I had been under during the few months before. However, I appreciated the fact that he believed I was capable of doing better.

The first year we were married, Neville was working in burns research at McGill, teaching anatomy and getting his master's degree in surgery. The year after our wedding, he went into the plastic surgery training program at McGill. In 1964, he received a Molson Fellowship to spend a year in England, training in the Mount Vernon Hospital in Middlesex, a major plastic surgery centre. I applied that year to take courses at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London. It was a wonderful year for both of us.

We ordered a car in Germany. On our arrival in Europe at the beginning of that summer, we went there to pick it up, and drove all over central Europe on twenty-five dollars a day. We arrived in England, and Neville started at Mount Vernon on July 1. During our year in England, we were able to see my brother Richard quite frequently. He was living in London, married, and had a son.

In the spring of 1965, we took a cruise in the Mediterranean, travelling steerage. During Easter holidays, we drove around Scotland and Wales. My parents were visiting England that year; I went to see them and took Mother a bunch of red roses. She spoke little to me, though Father

talked quite a bit. Mother's antagonism made it very awkward for him, and I appreciated his kindness.

At the end of the year in England, Neville and I returned to Montreal, where he continued his training at the Montreal General Hospital. In September, our first son, Ashley, was born. The following year, we kept hearing about the separatist movement (FLQ) in Quebec, while the city of Montreal was busy getting ready for Expo '67.

The year 1967 was an important one for us. Neville wrote his fellowship examinations while bombs were going off in public places and mail-boxes in Montreal. It was the beginning of the FLQ crisis in the province. Because of the political unrest, when Neville was offered a staff position in the Plastic Surgery department at the Scarborough General Hospital, he accepted, and we moved to Toronto, even though he had already been offered a junior staff position at McGill.

In February 1968, Mother suffered a minor heart attack. Subsequently, her doctor advised her to take a cruise abroad, so she took her cousin's daughter, Chi Chao, to study in the United States. Mother planned to visit her relatives there as well as in Vancouver. Her heart attack prompted her to get in touch with me, and she asked me to go to see her when she arrived in Vancouver. That summer, I took Ashley to Vancouver to see her. Mother's change in attitude towards me made life a great deal easier for Father and, from then on, my parents came to see us every year.

Whenever my parents visited us, Father always noticed how wonderful Toronto was with all its parks and its residential areas lined with large trees. Father loved nature, and often said that there were not enough trees in the populated areas of Hong Kong. Knowing me to be an avid gardener, he told me about his friend, Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, who also loved gardening.

We were living in a rented town-house complex in Toronto when my parents visited in 1970. Neville was the only staff surgeon at the Scarborough General Hospital who did not own his own house. Father thought it inadequate for a growing family, as we already had two children by then — Ashley and Justin, who was born in 1969. He said we should be in a house with a garden. But I had very particular ideas about the type of house I wanted; one with an art room connected to the kitchen, and we had not been able to find one. A house like that just did not exist, so we had decided to build our own, and we were saving up for it. It had always

been important to me to bring up our children with artistic training. I had not dreamt of asking my parents for help, but Father generously offered so that we could proceed to build our house on the land we had already purchased.

In the spring of 1972, we moved into our new house. When Father saw our unusually large living room, he offered to have a special carpet made through his Tianjin connection, who had made the carpets for the lobby of the Lee Gardens Hotel. He told me that a custom-made carpet would take up to a year. I was sent books from which to select the style I wanted, and I clipped colour samples from pictures of flowers in a magazine to match the bricks of the living-room wall. Father also asked me to choose a standard-sized carpet for our blue dining room. It did take a year for the large carpet to arrive, but it was worth the wait. It was most kind of Father, not only to have given us the carpets, but also to have gone to all that trouble of ordering them.

In the summer of 1972, Father arranged for my younger brother, Christopher, who had graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to have training in international finance. He was to go to Geneva, then Wall Street. The last stop was to be Tokyo, where he would work at Yamaichi Securities as well as Fuji Bank, whose president, Yoshizane Yuasa, was a friend of Father.<sup>4</sup> This was to be Christopher's golden opportunity.

Christopher was married then and had a son. When he and his family were on their way to New York, they visited us in Toronto and we had a wonderful time together. He said a strange thing to me during that visit: "Second Sister, I don't think I have long to live. Maybe a maximum of fifteen years. But I want to make it big before then!" He was overweight, but he had had a check-up just before leaving Hong Kong, and had been given a clean bill of health.

One day, not long after Christopher and his family arrived in New York, I received a call from Father saying that Christopher had died. He was only twenty-five years old! Neville and I quickly left for New York. Father was on his way from Hong Kong, but Mother did not come. Apparently, Christopher had been walking with a friend during lunch hour, when he suddenly collapsed and died. All the Lee family members in New York were called, and they were there for us, helping Father make funeral arrangements. Sixth Uncle, who was teaching at the University



of Kansas, also flew in. I was close to Christopher, but I could not even begin to feel the pain Father must have felt, or what Monica, my sister-in-law, must have gone through. Fortunately, the baby, Marcus, was too young to be traumatized by the event.

Father took Marcus and Monica back to Hong Kong with him after the funeral. He now had the added responsibility of Marcus's well-being. From then on, he became a father as well as a grandfather to Marcus. When Marcus was a little older, they spent every Saturday morning together. Marcus would go to Father's office to learn Chinese calligraphy, watched over by Father and taught by Miss Leung, a staff member well known for her calligraphy.

In the early 1970s, I became aware of the eventual change of sovereignty of Hong Kong. During one of my parents' visits, Father told me that he had been assured by the Chinese government that Hong Kong would remain the same for fifty years after 1997, so he was to feel free to invest and carry on with his business.

At Christmas 1976, as part of our annual visit to Hong Kong, Father treated us to a cruise on the *Rasasayang*, from Singapore to Bali. Our children — Ashley, Justin and Carter, who was born in 1973 — were so excited because it was their first cruise; they thought they were going on the *Love Boat*, which they had seen on television. When the hotel reservations were made for Singapore, Father would not consider the Mandarin Hotel despite the fact that it was regarded as the best, because his friend owned it, and would not charge if he knew Father was making the reservation.

February 1978 was my parents' golden wedding anniversary. Father was not one to celebrate. Since he never wanted anyone to make a fuss, he never even celebrated his own birthday. When Fourth Uncle insisted that such an important occasion should be celebrated, and the entire Lee family would celebrate for them, both Mother and Father were very happy. As the occasion was in February, only Carter and I could attend because our older children were in school. Neville stayed behind with them.

The anniversary party, held at the Lee Gardens Hotel, was attended by mainly family members and some very close friends. My parents had a really good time. They had a beautiful anniversary cake covered in golden *Oncidium* orchids. When Father spoke, he pointed out that he and Mother had been married fifty years ago on exactly the same spot in the



Lee Gardens. The only difference was that in 1928 they had stood on top of the hill. Father also mentioned that the recipe for a long-lasting marriage was “arguing a little from time to time!”

In the fall of 1978, I mentioned to Father that I wanted to take Neville and our sons to China. At that time, there was no regular tourism in China, only group visits arranged by the Chinese government. We had to go to the Embassy in Ottawa for visas, and we could only obtain them because Father had made arrangements through Beijing.

Father planned a wonderful trip for us. We first went to Hong Kong for Christmas; we then went into China by train. Those were the days when you could tell immediately that you had crossed the border, because the scenery changed from high-rises and motor cars to vegetable fields and bicycles. At the train station in Guangzhou, we were met by officials who helped us through border checking and customs. Then we were met by our guide, who stayed with us throughout our trip.

We flew from Guangzhou to Beijing and then worked our way south, visiting all the major sights, as well as areas that tourists were not normally allowed to enter. We met Mother’s cousin and his wife, Professors Eugene Chen and Winnifred Mao,<sup>5</sup> who were able to make special arrangements for us to visit the Plastic Surgery Hospital outside of Beijing, which was normally out of bounds. Neville marvelled at the surgical results achieved under very primitive conditions. In the Central Hospital in Beijing, we watched surgery performed while acupuncture was being used as anaesthetic. It was my first experience in an operating room, and I was utterly amazed that the patient was talking to the nurse while undergoing a thyroidectomy! We were also shown various other traditional Chinese treatments in other departments of the hospital.

We visited the Great Wall and the Forbidden City; then we went on to Hangzhou and Guilin. Everything we saw made a deep impression on us. At that time, people dressed in Mao suits and referred to one another as comrades. There were no modern hotels, and we ate in dining halls. Water was not turned on in our hotels until a set time in the morning. One thing I did notice under the Chinese Communist régime was that there were free markets on Sundays where the population could exercise their entrepreneurial skills.<sup>6</sup>

When we arrived in Guilin, our son Justin became ill. Neville diagnosed it as scarlet fever and put him on antibiotics right away. The last day we were there, Justin felt much better and came on the tour with us.

We then flew to Guangzhou on New Year's Eve, where we were met by Father who was so enthusiastic about our visit to China.

While in Guangzhou, we were guests of the government because of Father, and we stayed in the guest house reserved for visiting heads of state. Our boys wanted to buy firecrackers, so Father took us in a minibus to look for some. We ended up having a city tour, but we never did find any firecrackers. However, Father showed me a bridge of European design which he had helped to build at the beginning of the 1930s while working for the city of Guangzhou.

That evening, we were the guests of the deputy governor of Guangdong, since the governor was away. The dinner, held in the dining room of the guest house, was splendid. Food for officials, even in a poor Communist country, was the same anywhere in the world.

Father had planned for us to leave early the next morning to drive to our ancestral village, so the only time he could show me the garden in the complex was after dinner. We were all going to take a walk, but Justin said he couldn't walk because of swelling in his knees. Neville carried him to the bedroom while I took a walk with Father.

When I returned, Justin had a fever. Obviously, the antibiotic was not working. A doctor was called immediately, and she suggested that we take Justin to the hospital for a blood test. When we walked into the hospital, with Justin in Neville's arms, Justin said, after one look at the condition of the emergency department, "Don't leave me here!" We had no intention of doing that. Since it was New Year's Eve and all laboratories would be closed for two days, I decided that we should take Justin back to Hong Kong right away.

When we returned to the guest house, I went into Father's bedroom and woke him up. I said, "Daddy, I have to take Justin back to Hong Kong right away. Can you get us plane tickets for the earliest flight out?" He did not have to ask me why and what had happened at the hospital, because he knew there was a reason for my decision. "Tomorrow is New Year's Day. It may be very difficult," he said. "In that case," I said, "get me a car, and we will start driving to Hong Kong right away." He answered, "That would be even more difficult. The roads are bad, and it would take me longer to arrange for smooth passage through the border check points. I'll see what I can do. I'm expected at the ancestral village; Ashley and Carter can come with me." Unfortunately, Carter's name was on my passport, so he had to return to Hong Kong with us.

Neville and I started packing immediately while Father went downstairs to make arrangements. We were told by one of the officials that he would take us to the airport by five in the morning. He could not guarantee us four seats on the first flight to Hong Kong, but he would try his best. In the meantime, Father phoned Mother to say that she was to call Seventh Uncle to make arrangements for a paediatrician friend of his to see Justin when we arrived. On New Year's Day, it would be impossible to find a private doctor willing to work. Father phoned the Hong Kong airport to arrange for us to be met with a wheelchair, and for a car to take us to the Lee Gardens Hotel. (We always stayed at our hotel unless I was in Hong Kong alone or with just one of our children, in order not to inconvenience my parents and their household staff. The hotel was right across the street from my parents' home.) After making all the arrangements, Father went back to sleep.

The next morning we were awakened very early. The kitchen had prepared us a sumptuous breakfast which we could hardly swallow because we were so anxious. We said good-bye to Father and Ashley and left. We were very fortunate to be on that first flight to Hong Kong, which took only twenty-five minutes. We were met as Father had arranged. As soon as we arrived in our suite at the Lee Gardens Hotel, Mother called to say that Seventh Uncle had made the medical arrangements. Then Seventh Uncle called to say that he was sending his chauffeur to pick us up, and he would meet us at the Emergency Department of the Hong Kong Sanatorium.

At the Sanatorium, Seventh Uncle introduced us to a paediatrician friend who had been trained in the United States. The doctor confirmed that Justin had scarlet fever and prescribed a higher dose of antibiotic for him to take for a few more days. As the sanatorium is very expensive, we were overwhelmed when Seventh Uncle said he had already taken care of our medical bills. I have always had a very special relationship with him — he was more of a good friend than an uncle. After all, he was only ten years older than Neville. By that afternoon, Justin was already beginning to feel better. The next day, we all went to a movie at the Lee Theatre.

These events made me realize how very much I am like Father. We understood each other without having to say a word, and I know that if I had been in his shoes, I would have made arrangements exactly as he did.

In the meantime, Ashley was having the time of his life being a VIP guest with Father in Sunwui city, our ancestral home in China. In anticipation of our visit, Father had also planned to take us all back to Neville's ancestral village of Toisan, which is close to ours, being one of the Sze-yup villages. Although Neville wasn't there, Father took Ashley to Toisan anyway, because he felt that it was important for Ashley to know where his ancestors on both sides of the family came from. To Ashley's surprise, villagers from Toisan brought gifts to them, including a live chicken!

Back in Hong Kong, Ashley told us about his adventures. He said, "Gung Gung (Maternal Grandfather) took me to a firecracker factory where one of the people there brought me outside to light firecrackers, and I was allowed to light as many as I wanted; we went to see a hydro dam; we saw a large banyan tree by a river in Sunwui that was inhabited by thousands of white cranes; we sat in a hot spring where Gung Gung and I put eggs into the water to cook. But sharing a room with him is a problem, he snores so loudly!" Father was glad to see that Justin had recovered and promised him a similar trip to the village the next time.

Father was always happy when he visited China, and he was glad that I wanted to bring my family there.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A new airport was originally planned for Ping Shan in the New Territories. However, the colonial government realized that planes taking off and landing would have to circle over Chinese territories, and could be shot down. In fact, in the 1950s some civilian aircraft were shot down. The new runway in Kai Tak airport, which was capable of accommodating the largest jets, ran out into the sea at Kowloon Bay. It was completed at the end of the 1950s.

<sup>2</sup> At present he is the chairman and CEO of the Bank of East Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Mother thought I was such a good student that I should study law, but Father did not express an opinion.

<sup>4</sup> Notes from S. Shiraishi, Osaka, March 1997.

<sup>5</sup> From the 1970s, they were the ophthalmologists who looked after the eyes of the top leaders of China, including Deng Xiaoping.

<sup>6</sup> Apparently this practice was only allowed to revive in 1978, after having been banned for twenty years.

## CHAPTER 21

### **Hong Kong Society: From Turbulence to Reform**

**H**ong Kong society in the 1950s was divided into a number of factions: pro-Communist, pro-Nationalist, pro-British and others. Since politics was never mentioned in my home, I was not sure what faction my parents might have favoured, but from the actions of Father, I would say it is pro-Hong Kong people.

In the latter part of the 1950s, the Chinese government's attitude towards Hong Kong became more relaxed and, in 1956, due to strong local demand, the border between China and Hong Kong was reopened. Visitors from China were admitted freely into Hong Kong, provided they possessed re-entry permits to China. From February to September, sixty thousand came into Hong Kong and disappeared into the general population.<sup>1</sup> This became an added burden on the existing water supply, so the government moved to close the border again.

That year, violence erupted soon after I left for school in England. A dispute over the Nationalists' National Day (October 10) celebrations led to rioting between Nationalist and Communist supporters and against the colonial authority. The riot lasted for several days until British troops were called out. Dozens were killed, and thousands were arrested, imprisoned or deported.

The Hong Kong government passed a series of laws to tighten control of the population, giving it the power to close newspapers and imprison its publishers for political offences. When any society was formed, it had to register with the commissioner of police, and it was a criminal offence for any nine unrelated persons to assemble on the street. Even under these regulations, there was a certain amount of freedom as long as one did not advocate the overthrow of the colonial government.

Then came the 1960s which witnessed the terrible Cultural Revolution in China (1966–76). The upheavals spilled over into Hong Kong as social and political turbulence and riots. While the unrest shocked the



citizens of Hong Kong, the positive consequences of these protests eventually led to social reforms.

In China, in September 1965, Chairman Mao began to attack in earnest those he suspected as his opponents, and these events led to the Cultural Revolution. The youth were given a free hand to attack culture, learning and, worst of all, the educated people whom China needed most. During the summer of 1966, there were eight parades by the Red Guards, a total of 15 million youths, in Tiananmen Square. On August 22, 1966, mobs of Red Guards, inflamed by reports of atrocities perpetrated in Hong Kong by the British, invaded the British embassy in Beijing. The gates were broken and petrol cans were thrown at the buildings which were set on fire. Zhou Enlai had to send the police and the People's Liberation Army to rescue the diplomats.

The Cultural Revolution in China did not prevent my parents from travelling there in the 1960s. On one trip, He Mingsi, the secretary of Xinhua News Agency, accompanied them. They went to Chongqing, where we had lived during part of the Second World War. While Father was reminiscing to He Mingsi about the old days, they were suddenly surrounded by crowds of Red Guards. He Mingsi was really afraid, but fortunately, nothing happened.<sup>2</sup> The Red Guards were apparently just curious, since my parents, who tried to dress like the locals, didn't really look like the rest of them.

In 1966, a peaceful protest in Hong Kong by a small group of young people over an increase in ferry fares led to days of rioting by frustrated working-class young men against what they saw as the inequalities of society from which they had no escape. The police stopped the riots by force. One young man was killed and many arrests were made, and one demonstrator committed suicide afterwards. On top of that, the effects of the Cultural Revolution in China began to spread to Hong Kong.

In 1967, a factory labour dispute led to rioting in the working-class districts, which touched off continuous demonstrations by students from Communist schools against the colonial government. This soon developed into sporadic acts of violence by students and workers. Some Hong Kong Communists or self-styled "Red Guards" manufactured homemade bombs which killed several people. Bombs, commonly known as "pine-apples," were left in public places in order to cause maximum disturbance.<sup>3</sup> Some of them were real and some were not. C.T. Wu, deputy

general manager of the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong at the time, said that the hotel remained open during this time but that there was hardly any business at all. The police started taking the offensive that summer, making raids on Communist stores, unions and schools.<sup>4</sup> There were a few deaths and many people were arrested. During this period of unrest, hundreds of community organizations publicly declared their support for the Hong Kong government and against the Communists.

In one of the letters that Ruth Hayhoe<sup>5</sup> sent to her mother from Hong Kong that year, she wrote that the bombs were “small and innocuous,” and that she saw a Communist blown up by his own bomb in the summer. She also wrote that there was trouble in the Heep Yun Middle School where she was teaching. A fourth-form student put up a poster on the bulletin board denouncing the “slavery education” (Heep Yun is a Christian missionary school), and hung a red flag outside the school. When reproached, the student was very defiant and brought her father to the school. He was so angry that he slapped the head teacher across the face. Such was the atmosphere in Hong Kong in 1967.<sup>6</sup>

Rioters threw stones at buses, and drivers were beaten up. The London Insurance Association ordered Hong Kong insurance companies to cancel all riot insurance. The managing director of the Kowloon Bus Company went to see Yao Kang, a junior manager of Swire Insurance, to appeal to the company not to cancel their riot insurance, in order to give their drivers some measure of reassurance.<sup>7</sup> Rumours even spread that the Red Guards were marching against Hong Kong. With growing panic throughout the colony, the population hoarded food supplies, and store shelves were empty. While my parents were on a trip to Europe that summer, rumours spread that Dick and Esther Lee had left Hong Kong, so conditions must be irreversible. On hearing that, my parents returned to Hong Kong immediately.

Father felt a deep sense of responsibility to the people of Hong Kong. He believed that he could make a difference by appealing to the Chinese government not to incite the crowd. Father’s friend, Jack Cater, who was defence secretary of the Hong Kong government at the time, came to Father’s office every day during the worst period, asking for help.<sup>8</sup> Father appealed to Lian Weilin, director of Xinhua News Agency, and Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao*, to ask Zhou Enlai not to allow the riots to spread into Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> Actually, what happened in Hong Kong had very little to

do with China, for Premier Zhou Enlai had instructed the Xinhua News Agency that there would be no change in the status of Hong Kong.

Memories of the fall of Hong Kong in 1941 came back to Mother, and she was frightened. Father, on the other hand, would never consider abandoning Hong Kong; he would defend it with his life. Father took the lead, speaking publicly to calm the populace. He was outspoken against the Communists for their actions and for the disturbance caused in Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

Conditions in China went from bad to worse. Anyone could be subject to attack. Mother's cousins, Professor Eugene Chen and his wife, Professor Winnifred Mao (mentioned in the last chapter) were denounced, beaten and driven out of their home. Their crime was that they were educated, and worse, Professor Chen had been trained at Johns Hopkins in the United States. They survived and moved away and lived in obscurity until my parents found them at the beginning of the 1970s. At the end of 1978, when we met them during our visit to Beijing, Professor Chen showed us the French beret and a pair of Western-style leather shoes he had managed to hide from the Red Guards. He said that if these had been found, they would have been killed.

As the Red Guards went through China like locusts, dead bodies were dumped into the rivers. Some of these floated into Hong Kong waters<sup>11</sup> and stirred up feelings of sadness and fear, since everyone in Hong Kong had relatives and friends in China. However, conditions gradually improved in Hong Kong. By the beginning of 1969, everything was back to normal.

The riots that started in Hong Kong in 1966 prompted the Hong Kong government to triple public spending on education to provide more opportunities for young people, and to improve housing, health care and social welfare. In 1967 the government realized that its legitimacy was no longer based on the Sino-British Treaties of the nineteenth century, but had to be earned by its performance and by some sense of community involvement.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the children of the refugees had grown up. The census of 1971 showed, for the first time, that there was a locally born majority. As the members of the older generation among the refugees died and were buried in Hong Kong, their offspring gained a sense of belonging to the colony. Those who had made possible the eco-

nomic and industrial take-off in the 1950s and the 1960s could now enjoy the fruits of their labour.

The improvements in assistance to education, initiated by the government, meant that more children of illiterate parents now had the opportunity to finish high school. A grant and loan scheme introduced in 1969 guaranteed funding for needy students to complete courses at local universities. The availability of opportunities for those with merit helped further economic growth and encouraged a sense of belonging. When the people of Hong Kong realized that they not only had been born and bred in the colony, but also had made great contributions to its success, they started to demand improvements. The demands were not political, but social and economic.

There were successive strikes and protests spear-headed by university students, teachers, social workers, church leaders, nurses and trade unionists. These strikes were basically peaceful and orderly, and were characterized by a sense of purposefulness and self-discipline, even though they broke the law concerning illegal association and illegal assembly. The limited amount of violence that took place was often provoked by the police.<sup>12</sup>

University students led the Chinese-language movement which demanded that Chinese be made an official language along with English. After numerous sit-ins and public forums that were widely supported in the community, the government conceded official status for Cantonese to be used for most public, administrative and political uses.

Corruption has always been endemic in Hong Kong. Not much was done until the 1970s, when demonstrations were organized by university students and church groups involving tens of thousands of citizens. The anti-corruption movement targeted the Hong Kong police and other public agencies.

In 1973, High Court Judge Sir Alastair Blair Kerr was appointed by Governor MacLehose to sit on a one-man commission to investigate the conduct of the chief superintendent of the Royal<sup>13</sup> Hong Kong Police Force, Peter Godber, who sneaked out of Hong Kong while on suspension from duty during this investigation of his suspected corrupt activities. The two Blair Kerr reports and the ensuing public outcry led to the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in February 1974, with Jack Cater as commissioner. Peter Godber was



extradited from Britain and brought back to Hong Kong to face trial.<sup>14</sup> Many police officers were charged, many more resigned, and the force was reorganized. Eventually, the Independent Commission Against Corruption Ordinance outlawed gift-taking by public officials.

Throughout the 1970s, the Christian Industrial Committee and other church-related groups organized labour protests, and encouraged the development of a movement independent of the Communist or Nationalist parties, resulting in a number of improvements to the Labour Ordinance. A successful primary-school teachers' strike led to the formation of the Professional Teachers' Union. This was followed by a nurses' strike. Both white- and blue-collar unions raised the spectre of a rightful challenge to arbitrary authority. Areas such as Chater Garden, Victoria Park, the square outside Central Government Offices and the side gate of Government House became well-recognized sites for public gatherings. While the ordinances against illegal associations and assembly remained in the statute books, their application became rarer. Demonstrators were met by police escorts who directed traffic, and by government officials who received the petitions.<sup>15</sup>

In many cases, significant concessions were made to the protesters. Through this process, both Hong Kong society and government became strengthened. Hong Kong changed from the colonial style of government to one that was more responsive to the needs of the population in education and language. The civil service was upgraded and social justice improved. The government, while retaining ultimate political power, exercised it in a radically different manner by the early 1970s.

It was my parents' view that, after the 1970s, the governors of Hong Kong were diplomats who no longer dictated to the people of Hong Kong.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports* (Hong Kong, 1965), pp. 188-89.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with He Mingsi, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, July 17, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> She was appointed Director of the Institute of Education in Hong Kong in 1997, and was also professor of comparative education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.



<sup>6</sup> Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, October 28, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997. The chairman, Sir Adrian Swire, was in Hong Kong at the time. Yao, as a junior manager, told Sir Adrian that since these were political riots, the material damage probably would not be large, and besides, the company should not let their clients down just when they needed help most. With the powers delegated to the Hong Kong company, it had the right to make its own decisions. As a result, Swire maintained riot insurance for its clients, and in the end, not a cent was lost by the company, and Swire gained a lot of public confidence.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996; article by Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" (Remembering R.C. Lee), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Ruth Hayhoe to her mother, July 3, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Luk, "The Rise of a Civil Society in Hong Kong," presented at the Human Rights and Democracy in Asia Conference, Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, Toronto, May 16-17, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> The word "Royal" was added to the Hong Kong Police Force only after the disturbances of 1967. Sir Jack Cater, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Notes from Sir Jack Cater provided by Lady Cater, Hong Kong, August 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Luk, "The Rise of a Civil Society in Hong Kong."

## CHAPTER 22

### A Vision for Higher Education

Father was always a great supporter of education. Until 1969, as mentioned in the last chapter, there was no government assistance for higher education in Hong Kong, and students who were accepted into university but couldn't afford to pay for their tuition had to approach private individuals for financial help. Father was often approached with such requests. He kept letters from students in his pocket so he would not forget to look into matters for them. He would check into the entrance records of these students, and if the request came from a worthy student, he or she would be given financial support, consisting of money for tuition, lodging and expenses. In fact, in his later years, he gave financial support to worthy students a year in advance, just in case something should happen to him.<sup>1</sup>

We were told by some students that he was the only wealthy person in Hong Kong who bothered to answer their letters. Many of these students have gone on to great careers and, even though Father did not want any thanks, they never forgot him. Father's concern for the education of the younger generation did not end at the personal level. Despite being a Christian, he officiated at the opening ceremony of the Confucius Hall Middle School in 1964. In striving to aid a greater number through the establishment of educational institutions, he helped in activities such as raising funds for the Mong Kok Workers Children's School, a school for the children of the working class.<sup>2</sup>

During the Cultural Revolution, Chi Chao, one of the daughters of Mother's cousins, Chen and Mao, escaped to Hong Kong with a classmate in her graduating class at Zhongshan Medical College, in a boat with other refugees. Mother received a call from her after she arrived in Hong Kong. My parents took it upon themselves to take care of her education and sent her to the United States to learn English. She subsequently entered the school of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. In spite of having to start her studies all over again in another language,

Chi Chao, to her great credit, completed her training in ophthalmology at Johns Hopkins, as her father had. She is now the head of the immunopathology section of the National Eye Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.<sup>3</sup>

When Father's secretary, Mabel Wu, retired in the early 1970s, he asked Anna Li, a secretary at Western Trading, one of our subsidiaries, to work for him. Anna told me that she was asked because she was not like other secretaries who would read popular magazines in their free time. On occasions when Father was at Western Trading, he saw Anna studying, but he didn't know that she was studying for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) examination. She was then nineteen years old, and was reluctant to work for Father because she said she was too young and inexperienced. However, he convinced her that she could learn a great deal from him.

It was just like Father to send his secretary to evening school at the University of Hong Kong to learn English. Anna said she never missed a class even when she didn't feel well, because, with Father's connections at Hong Kong University, he would know if she missed one. Anna said that she didn't sleep for three months when she first worked for Father because she was so nervous. During the years she worked for him she spent many hours crying, because he was very direct, but she knew he always meant well. Anna was unsure of speaking English on the phone and, since this was very necessary in Father's office, he sent her to Oxford the following year for a six-week summer course, again arranged through the University of Hong Kong. Anna's sister took her place as Father's secretary during the time that she was away.

Father continued to help many students in his lifetime. One of them, Gloria Tam, wrote to Father during her two-year scholarship stay in England. She was admitted into medical school at the University of Hong Kong, but her family could not afford it. When Father found out that she was a scholarship student and that her parents worked as reporters at *Ta Kung Pao*, he said he would put her through. Gloria became a gynaecologist. After Father died, Anna's former husband was helped by Gloria in finding employment, thanks to the relationship that Father had established. Gloria became the assistant director of the Department of Health in Hong Kong. During the H5N1 epidemic (Avian influenza) in Hong Kong in 1997-98, it was she who was responsible for negotiating with China for the importation of healthy chickens to Hong Kong.

Anna Li was the one who really knew how Father treated others, not only because she saw him every day during the week, but because she was the one who prepared all the cheques for him to sign. Anna said, "I made out a cheque for eight hundred dollars monthly for one of the watchmen (of one of the buildings owned by the Lee family) for his children's schooling because he had contracted tuberculosis. And when it came to help for university students, your father always gave them their allowances a year in advance."

Anna married the son of Father's old friend, Tsui Gang Bo. In the late 1970s, when Anna had a family, Father would often let her use our launch with her husband and children when he wasn't using it himself.

On my parents' visits to Toronto, I often heard Father mention the importance of establishing a Chinese university in Hong Kong for the Chinese population. The following are the reasons, as well as the events that brought about the establishment of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in which he was very involved.

After the end of the Second World War, and the civil war in China that followed, there was a large influx of population<sup>4</sup> from China into Hong Kong as mentioned earlier, which put heavy demands on the education system in the colony, particularly on higher education.

The University of Hong Kong had been established in 1911 to serve as a centre for Sino-British contact in the sphere of learning, and for the maintenance of good relations with China. In other words, it was not intended to serve the population of Hong Kong. Before the Second World War, the university served mainly as an outpost of Western culture, admitting students from Southeast Asia and China, as well as from Hong Kong.

In 1946, it was felt that the greatly damaged university should be re-established because of the need to maintain the British position and prestige in the Far East. In 1948, when Father's friend, Lindsay Ride, became vice-chancellor, Father was asked to be a member of the Court of the University.

By 1950, the government was becoming aware that the University of Hong Kong should reflect the needs of local society, instead of being an institution to uphold British prestige. With the continual political turbulence in China, foreign academic organizations withdrew from the mainland, and international cultural activities were interrupted. Hong Kong

was then in a position to play an important role in Chinese and Western cultural contacts.

The influx of refugees from China helped to bring about industrialization in Hong Kong, and in turn, created a need for more higher education in the colony. Among the refugee population was a large number of students from the Chinese middle schools who could no longer return to China for university, and they wanted to continue their higher education in Hong Kong. However, not only was the number of places available at the University of Hong Kong inadequate, but also there was little chance that any student from the Chinese middle schools could gain admission, since English was the language of instruction.

Governor Sir Alexander Grantham (the governor who came to our home with his wife) appointed a special committee to look into the problem, and the result was the *Keswick Report*. It was the first public document to propose that higher education in Hong Kong should be geared to the needs of the people. It also recommended that the university remain the only institution to award degrees. The government immediately allocated funding to the university for the introduction of Chinese-language courses, beginning with the 1952-53 academic year. This move was widely supported by the senate of the university, but turned down by the council. There was an underlying fear that the introduction of Chinese-language courses would eventually transform the university. The council said that what the university needed most in the postwar period was time for consolidation rather than a new direction in its development.

In 1953, Ivor Jennings and Douglas Logan, experts in British university administration, were invited to advise on the development of the university. The *Jennings-Logan Report* asserted that the University of Hong Kong should remain an English-speaking university. As far as they were concerned, it was the government's job to fill the gap between the university and the Chinese middle schools. In order to prepare these graduates for admission into university, a special two-year program was designed at the Clementi Middle School. However, this program did not solve the problem, because it could accommodate only a very limited number of students.

The education system in Hong Kong has always been divided into Chinese and English. The students in the English system (the one I was in) had access to a complete education from primary to university levels,



whereas the students in the Chinese system could not go farther than middle school. Before 1949, these students had been able to continue their education in mainland China. The Chinese system in Hong Kong followed the curriculum prescribed by the Nationalist government in China, and textbooks produced in Shanghai were used in these schools. Many Chinese schools in Hong Kong were associated with schools in Guangzhou. However, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong students could no longer go to the mainland to complete their studies. This placed an added burden on the education system, and the situation was exacerbated by the large influx of refugee students from China.

A number of dedicated and experienced refugee scholars from China took up the challenge. Driven by educational ideals, the mission of propagating Chinese culture and educating the young, as well as the need to earn a living, scholars and professionals in various fields used crude facilities and rented classrooms to establish so-called "refugee colleges." According to a government survey in 1952, there were more than thirty colleges of this kind, varying in standards and the length of their programs. Nine of these were of higher standard, offering four-year programs in arts and commerce. Among them were New Asia College,<sup>5</sup> Chung Chi College, and the forerunner of United College. These three were to emerge later as the foundation colleges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The survival of these colleges depended greatly on international support, and in the case of Chung Chi, the support of the Protestant church. The government had granted the site of Ma Liu Shui Valley to Chung Chi College, thanks to the persistence of Rev. R.O. Hall, bishop of the Hong Kong Anglican Church. It proved to be an important asset to the future Chinese university.

By 1956, the degrees awarded by the colleges gained recognition from many universities in America and Europe, some of which even granted scholarships to the more outstanding students. Yet in Hong Kong, the degrees were not recognized by the colonial government for employment or for further training. The private colleges received no financial support, but were still subject to the control of the Education Department and the Education Ordinance of 1952. So in 1956, the three colleges banded together to strive for government recognition and support.

After consultation with the representatives of the three colleges, Charles Long, Yale-in-Asia representative at New Asia and a trustee of the college, sent a memorandum to D.J.S. Crozier, director of education, on August 16, 1956. The memorandum began by pointing out that the private colleges should not be governed by the Education Ordinance of 1952, which was intended to apply to primary and secondary education in Hong Kong, and that special regulations should be drawn up for colleges that were aspiring to university standards.

The memorandum went on to state that, as part of the Hong Kong education system, the colleges could not depend entirely on the financial assistance of foreign missions, foundations and private donations. The government should take responsibility for providing support for basic facilities and recurrent expenses. The memorandum also said that, under the existing government policy, thousands of intelligent young people were leaving the colony in search of higher education overseas or in Taiwan, thereby creating a potential loss in leadership. The memorandum concluded that it would be difficult for the private colleges to provide the best possible contribution to tertiary education unless the government offered support for them to develop university status for awarding degrees. This became the first document in the government file on the founding of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

In January 1956, L.G. Morgan, deputy director of education, observed that the Chinese middle school could not but feel grievance at a situation whereby the government provided \$8 million annually to the University of Hong Kong for the students from the Anglo-Chinese schools, and made little or no provision for those from the Chinese middle schools. In another memorandum in October of the same year, Morgan proposed five possible measures to meet the overall needs of the Chinese middle school students. The most significant proposal was “the establishment of a Chinese university with its own charter and degree granting powers.”<sup>6</sup> However, Morgan’s own recommendation still suggested that the University of Hong Kong broaden its function and accept a greater responsibility in meeting the needs of the community.

That same month, there were bloody riots caused by confrontations between pro-Nationalist and pro-Communist political groups. This situation persuaded the government that it could no longer ignore the demand

for more postsecondary education for its population.<sup>7</sup> In January 1957, representatives of Chung Chi, New Asia and United, the “refugee colleges,” met with the Education Department. Bishop Hall and Charles Long also attended the meeting, which ended without any decision. In February, the Chinese Colleges Joint Council was established. After numerous meetings and discussions, in August 1958, it was finally decided that another university should be established in Hong Kong.

On June 2, 1959, the Hong Kong government officially announced that it was prepared to establish a new university with Chinese as the main language of instruction. Sir John Fulton, professor of history and a tutor at Oxford for many years (and incidentally, a former teacher of Father, as well as of Governor Sir Robert Black and Governor Sir Murray MacLehose), was appointed as advisor to Governor Sir Robert Black. In his 1959 report, *The Development of Post-Secondary Colleges in Hong Kong*, submitted to the governor in March 1960, he stated that academic freedom, university autonomy, and research and bicultural mission were especially important in shaping the basic character of the future university.<sup>8</sup>

According to Professor Ma Lin, vice-chancellor of the Chinese University from 1978 to 1987, Sir John Fulton, now Lord Fulton, was the midwife of the Chinese University, and the good results of the delivery were in many ways due to the close friendship between Sir John and Father. On several occasions, Father flew to Yorkshire, where Sir John lived in his retirement, to speak to him regarding the Chinese University, and Father could be very persuasive.<sup>9</sup>

Up to this point, the “refugee” colleges had their roots in China and an early association with American educational foundations and universities, but they lacked British experience and connections. Sir John Fulton brought with him the experience of three different British universities, Oxford, Wales and Sussex. The introduction of new ideas was facilitated by the British Council and the University of Hong Kong in a series of open forums and conferences held in 1960 and 1961.

Following the *Fulton Report*, a Provisional Council of twenty members was formed: two government officials, the three presidents of the colleges, the vice-chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Lindsay Ride, and prominent members from the community. The council was chaired by C.Y. Kwan, with Father as the vice-chairman. The council

promptly adopted the name, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Father had the added responsibility of being the chairman of the Campus Planning Committee as well as the chairman of the Tender Board. From then on, until the end of his life, Father spent a great deal of his time and energy promoting the establishment and growth of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He considered it to be one of his “children.” Without Father’s dedication, Professor Ma Lin told me, the Chinese University would not be the way it is today.<sup>10</sup>

It was to the credit of the council that the magnificent site of three hundred acres adjacent to Chung Chi College at Ma Liu Shui<sup>11</sup> was secured from the government. The area was not only able to accommodate the university, but also provided ample space for future expansion. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ordinance, together with its statutes, was passed in the Legislative Council and came into effect in September 1963. On October 17, 1963, the governor, in his capacity as chancellor, officiated at the inauguration ceremony.

On October 9, 1964, the first meeting of the Campus Planning Committee was held in Father’s office in Edinburgh House. These meetings continued to be held in Father’s office at different locations until 1977, when the venue changed to the Lee Gardens Hotel. Father served on this committee and on the council until he passed away in 1983.

Being a civil engineer, Father was in the perfect position to oversee the buildings to be erected on campus. The work was monumental. The project was similar to building a mini-city on hills that had to be terraced, while the mud and rocks were transported to the opposite side of Tolo Harbour for the construction of the Plover Cove reservoir.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of the campus of Chung Chi College, the committee was working with raw land, most of which was without infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer connections. In the minutes of the meeting of 1966, it was mentioned that sea water had to be used for flushing because it was not clear whether the government would be piping water from the Sha Tin Treatment Works within the following two years. In the minutes of 1967, it was noted that planting on steep hilly sections had to be done immediately because the slopes were too steep to be turfed.

The fact that Father had so many friends in the government was a great advantage for the university. Father’s friend, Szeto Wai, was hired as the architect, and Plover Cove Engineers were the engineers for the



university. In the initial stage, Father asked Szeto to travel to the best universities in the world, and he visited fifteen of the finest and most beautiful in the mid-1960s before he designed the campus for the Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>13</sup>

As the vice-chairman of the council, Father would chair the meetings once or twice a year. Father had a reputation for running meetings that were short and efficient. They always started on time, and were seldom longer than forty-five minutes. Once, a council member arrived ten minutes late and, by the time he sat down, the part of the meeting pertaining to matters raised by that particular council member was over.<sup>14</sup>

Father not only worked very hard for the Chinese University of Hong Kong in dealing with the government and getting the new buildings built, he also donated a great deal of money towards its founding. His greatest show of faith took place when my younger brother Christopher attended the university and graduated from it. When Christopher lived in residence, he told Father that his mattress was uncomfortable. So, Father bought new mattresses for the entire residence!

At the beginning of 1983, Father wanted to experiment with the reproduction of purified yeast used in the production of Chinese rice wine, which many Chinese use for medicinal purposes. He asked Professor Ma Lin (the vice-chancellor) to see if it could be reproduced in the laboratory at the Chinese University. The experiment was successful, and Father planned to experiment with fermentation at home. So, besides helping to found the university, Father had fun keeping his curiosity alive on campus.

Father was so concerned about the well-being of the Chinese University of Hong Kong that he treated it as one of his “children” in his will. Mother not only continued to be a great supporter of the university after Father died, but she also considered it as one of her “children.” And because of Father’s influence, different members of the Lee family continue to be very generous to the university. My favourite artifact from Grandfather’s time, an ivory mammoth tusk carved with the story of the Three Kingdoms, is proudly displayed in the museum at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Shortly after Father’s death, Mother established the R.C. Lee Memorial Gold Medal in Surgery, to be awarded to the best student in the final



year in the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Surgery. In September 1987, the Council at the Chinese University named the Science Centre Lecture Hall Complex the "R.C. Lee Lecture Hall" as a perpetual memorial to Father. In October 1988, the Chinese University of Hong Kong awarded Mother an honorary degree for her role as a public figure in Hong Kong, and for her continuous support of the university.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, January 29, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Dr. Chi Chao Chan, Baltimore, October 1997.

<sup>4</sup> The population increased fourfold between 1945 and 1949.

<sup>5</sup> It became associated with Yale University.

<sup>6</sup> Alice N.H. Lun Ng, ed., *The Quest for Excellence* (Hong Kong, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>10</sup> It was established in October 1951 by representatives of Protestant churches.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Campus Committee meetings from 1964 to 1983. Provided by Vincent W.S. Chen of the Campus Committee of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 23

### The Japanese Connection

For obvious reasons, after the Second World War, it was very difficult for Japanese businesses to become established in Hong Kong. Although Father had been in the resistance during the war, when peace came, he felt that everyone should put the past aside. He believed that Japan would prosper, and he wanted to build long-term relationships in order to bring prosperity to the people of Hong Kong.

As a progressive thinker, Father was always invited to the Sauntering meetings, started by a Chinese scholar who had attended Waseda University in Tokyo. It was a study group, a monthly dinner gathering of about twelve top Japanese businessmen in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup> Father was held in such high esteem that Japanese businessmen, and even the Consul-General of Japan,<sup>2</sup> would pay him a courtesy visit whenever they were in Hong Kong.

When the Japanese Club was established in 1955, Father was one of the first to offer assistance.<sup>3</sup> The club was originally located in the Victoria Hotel, with 106 corporate and private members. By November 1996, the membership had increased to more than 25,000. Aside from dining facilities, the activities available included language instruction in Chinese and English, doll-making, Chinese painting and calligraphy.<sup>4</sup> And throughout the history of the club, it has been located mostly in buildings owned by the Lee family.<sup>5</sup>

By the late 1960s, it had become absolutely necessary for Japanese financial institutions to establish Hong Kong subsidiaries in conjunction with leading Hong Kong business people, in order to survive. Father had been invited to be a partner by different Japanese enterprises, but he made it his policy not to get involved.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s, my parents would host an annual dinner at the Lee Gardens Hotel for all the Japanese executives in Hong Kong, in order for them to make friends with members of the Chinese business community.

Despite Father's policy in regard to Japanese businesses in Hong Kong, he viewed his involvement in education quite differently. Father played an important role in the establishment of a Japanese school for Japanese children whose parents lived in Hong Kong. He helped the school acquire government permits to operate as a foreign school, and negotiated approvals from the departments of Education, Public Works, Health and Fire. According to a report sent to the Japanese government from the Consulate-General of Japan, without Father's help, the process would have been difficult and lengthy.

When Father first heard of the plans to establish a Japanese school, he suggested that it be located in the space in Tower Court (owned by the Lee family) which was about to be vacated by the Hong Kong Education Department.<sup>7</sup> However, the preparatory committee for the establishment of the school had not yet been formed,<sup>8</sup> and no action could be taken.

Fifth Uncle, who looked after rentals in the Lee Hysan Estate Company, had many inquiries about the space, but Father stubbornly insisted that it be held for the opening of the Japanese school, without any rent or deposit. It stood vacant for half a year. In January 1966, the Japanese government allocated a subsidiary budget for the Hong Kong Japanese School, and only then was the school able to pay rent.<sup>9</sup> An official tenancy agreement was then signed. On May 10, 1966, the Japanese School,<sup>10</sup> located on the second and the third floors of Tower Court,<sup>11</sup> opened with seventy students.

Father continued to take great interest in the Japanese School and gave advice to Ichiro Fujita, the principal. The school opened extension classrooms in the Ling Ying Building<sup>12</sup> and, on January 24, 1976, a primary school opened on Blue Pool Road.<sup>13</sup> The school kept expanding, and the junior high opened on Braemar Hill Road on October 23, 1982. At the latter's opening ceremony, Ichiro Fujita made a speech in front of all the students and guests, referring to the cherished friendship between himself and Father, expressing his heartfelt and sincere gratitude, and introducing Father as the "true benefactor and patron of the Hong Kong Japanese School."<sup>14</sup>

On March 12, 1969, Father was decorated with the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, by the Japanese Emperor. The third-highest Order in Japan, it was established in 1888.<sup>15</sup> The cer-

emony was held at the official residence of the Consul-General of Japan, Akira Okada, at 24 Po Shan Road in Hong Kong. Father was proud of this award, despite the fact that it took several years to get permission from the Queen of England to wear and use the name of the Order. One of the conditions imposed was that its name must always be given in full, to prevent confusion with British Orders.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1960s, Father re-established his friendship with his boxing friend from his Oxford days, Konosuke Koike, and they visited each other in Hong Kong and Tokyo. Koike was the eldest son of the founder of Yamaichi Securities<sup>17</sup> and the chairman of the company. In 1964, Yamaichi encountered financial difficulties and asked for help from major Japanese banks headed by the Industrial Bank of Japan (IBJ). Koike resigned and Teru Hidaka from the Industrial Bank of Japan came to Yamaichi as president. By May 1965, the company's financial position had deteriorated further, and it sought more help from the Bank of Japan and the Central Bank.

At the beginning of 1970, when the situation had improved and Yamaichi Securities wanted to open a company in Hong Kong, Yamaichi took advantage of the friendship between Father and the former chairman, Konosuke Koike. Officers from Yamaichi paid Father a visit with a letter from his old friend Koike requesting help in the setting up of a Hong Kong company. On hearing that his friend had taken the responsibility for mismanagement in the company and had resigned from the chairmanship, Father was sympathetic. He remembered his own experiences as the eldest son, and the financial difficulties our family had experienced when Grandfather was murdered. Father said that if by agreeing to join the board of Yamaichi (Hong Kong), he could help his friend, he would do so gladly. He immediately gave suggestions for possible contacts as directors and shareholders.<sup>18</sup>

Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd. opened its office in Hong Kong in July 1971. Teru Hidaka was named chairman and Father was the deputy chairman.<sup>19</sup> Konosuke Koike became an honorary advisor. Father brought many influential people into the company as directors, and introduced many important clients.

August 16, 1971 was the date set for a cocktail reception at the Mandarin Hotel to celebrate the opening of Yamaichi International (H.K.)

Ltd. The weather was dreadful and the typhoon signal was up. By evening, the cross-harbour ferry had stopped running. However, in spite of the weather, many distinguished guests attended and Yamaichi credited Father's influence for the fact that so many people made the effort.<sup>20</sup>

Shinichi Shiraishi,<sup>21</sup> the sales manager of Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd.,<sup>22</sup> came to know Father because it was his responsibility to increase business in Hong Kong. He met Father from time to time to explain the situation of the Tokyo stock market, and to report the business results of the Hong Kong company. Father was pleased to see the business growing steadily, and was always very happy to see his old friend Koike at the shareholders' meetings which took place every July in Hong Kong. Shiraishi noticed how Father always paid a great deal of attention to Koike and his wife, even though Teru Hidaka was the "big boss."<sup>23</sup>

By 1982, Yamaichi Securities wanted to become a wholly owned company. Officers from the company consulted Father as to the possibilities of buying back the shares in Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd. With his usual wish to help others, Father asked them to leave the matter with him. He proceeded to contact the Hong Kong directors and shareholders and made arrangements for the company to buy back the shares. Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd. became a wholly owned company, and the board and shareholders felt greatly indebted to Father.<sup>24</sup>

Mother told me that the Causeway Bay area became very prosperous because of Father's Japanese friends. Causeway Bay is the area where Grandfather bought East Point Hill, which his descendants have subsequently developed. It is also where many members of the Lee family lived from the beginning of the 1950s to the mid-1980s, including my own family. There are many Japanese businesses located in the area.

When the first Japanese department store, Daimaru, opened in Causeway Bay in November 1960, a Chinese managing director was needed in addition to his Japanese counterpart, so Father introduced his friend, Liu Huo Yan from Taiwan, who spoke Japanese, for the post.<sup>25</sup> Sogo Department Store opened its first store in Causeway Bay in May 1985, and has since opened many branches all over Hong Kong. The well-known up-scale department store, Mitsukoshi, the Japanese Club, and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce are all located in Causeway Bay.

Father often lent a hand to these businesses when they opened in



Hong Kong. At the Mitsukoshi (Hong Kong) opening, he took part in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. In his letter of thanks, Shigeru Okada, president of Mitsukoshi Limited, wrote:

... I firmly believe that it was indeed in virtue of your personality and through your courtesy that we could have the notables and the potentates of all spheres of social activities in Hong Kong and varied V.I.P.'s at those occasions, and herein I express my sincere gratitude for it.<sup>26</sup>

By the 1980s, Japanese investments had become one of the major economic forces in the colony. Father's talent for making friends and building relationships had helped to bring prosperity to Hong Kong.

During the Asian economic crisis at the end of 1997, Yamaichi Securities, the fourth-largest securities company in Japan, went bankrupt. The Hong Kong operation, Yamaichi International (H.K.) Ltd., was sold to Core Pacific Group,<sup>27</sup> a Taiwanese conglomerate, at just under \$88 million, which was the net value of the business. The offer was considered a good deal by Yamaichi advisors, given the tough Asian market conditions. The company was valuable because Core Pacific wanted to capitalize on Yamaichi International's strong business presence in mainland China. The company was renamed Core Pacific Yamaichi.

In a letter to me, S. Shiraishi, former vice-president of Yamaichi, wrote:

Since YIH (Yamaichi International Hong Kong) started business in 1971 with great help of your father and your family members, YIH has established its name not only in Hong Kong but also in Asia in general during last 27 years. The Co. has favorable financial conditions and many capable and dedicating local staff. YIH is very active in handling China related stocks in the last few years.<sup>28</sup>

Given the circumstances, Father would have been pleased to know that the purchase agreement with Core Pacific included keeping all 121 employees of the Hong Kong operation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Achievement report from the Consulate-General of Japan sent to the Japanese government. 1968.

<sup>4</sup> In 1969 a Japanese Chamber of Commerce was established, separate from the club.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Y. Yoshioka, secretary general of the Hong Kong Japanese Club, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Notes from S. Shiraishi of Yamaichi Securities, Osaka, Japan, March 1997.

<sup>7</sup> The latter was to move into the Lee Gardens Hotel podium upon its completion across the street.

<sup>8</sup> Established on October 2, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> However, the money was returned to the principal, Ichiro Fujita, as Father determined that, for the first three months, from January through March, no rent would be accepted. Everyone at the school was overwhelmed by his generous spirit. Ichiro Fujita, *The Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue of the Hong Kong Japanese School*, May 10, 1986, p. 39, translated by Y. Yoshioka, secretary general of the Hong Kong Japanese Club. The original article appeared in Phoenix Publication no. 13.

<sup>10</sup> In 1975, the Japanese School moved into its own building at 157 Blue Pool Road.

<sup>11</sup> Special guests were Father, Consul-General of Japan Mr. Endo, Deputy Director of the Department of Education Sir Y.K. Kan as Chinese representative, and Sir Kenneth Fung Ping Fun, who successfully persuaded the Hong Kong government to allow the Japanese School to teach pupils in accordance with the formal school curriculums laid down by the Japanese government.

<sup>12</sup> In 1994, it was demolished and rebuilt as part of Caroline Centre.

<sup>13</sup> Father was their special guest at each of the opening ceremonies.

<sup>14</sup> Fujita, *The Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue of the Hong Kong Japanese School*, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> It is associated with the sacred mirror and the string of gems with gold rays, which is only used for higher grades of decorations. Notes from Y. Yoshioka, Hong Kong, August 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East* (Hong Kong, 1988), dedicated to Father, p. 424.

<sup>17</sup> Founded in 1897.

<sup>18</sup> Notes from S. Shiraishi, March 1997. Shiraishi was the sales manager in Hong Kong under Shigeki Morishita when Yamaichi International (H.K.) opened.

<sup>19</sup> Until September 1982, when Yamaichi International (H.K.) became wholly owned by Yamaichi.

<sup>20</sup> Notes from S. Shiraishi, February 1997.

<sup>21</sup> At the time of the writing of this book, he is deputy president of Yamaichi Securities Co. Ltd., one of the four largest securities companies in Japan.

<sup>22</sup> Between 1971 and 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Notes from S. Shiraishi, Osaka, March 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Father from Shigeru Okada, president of Mitsukoshi Limited, September 3, 1981. Mitsukoshi was established in 1673 and incorporated in 1904.

<sup>27</sup> *Asian Economic News*, December 22, 1997. Core Pacific is a group of engineering and securities companies led by Taiwanese businessman, Tony Shen.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from S. Shiraishi, January 11, 1998.

<sup>29</sup> *Asian Economic News*, December 22, 1997.

## CHAPTER 24

### The Chinese Patriot

The leaders of China called Father a patriot, meaning he was loyal to the Chinese government. But patriotism meant something different to Father; he was patriotic to the Chinese people, irrespective of the governments under which they live.

The letter Father wrote in his youth to his school in Hong Kong shows that he had always been proud of being Chinese, and at the same time concerned with the state of affairs in China. I became aware of this by the end of the 1940s, for by then I was old enough to observe how he conducted his life. He tried very hard to alleviate human suffering both in Hong Kong and in China. He was only one man, but he believed that one man could make a difference.

Mother told me one day that when she first met Father, he spoke English with an Oxford accent, but later (by the time I understood English), he spoke it with a Chinese accent. She was sure this was intentional. Most people would have flaunted their Oxford accent for the rest of their lives, but Father did not. Because of his pride in Hong Kong, for a number of years Father arranged, at his own expense, for a number of students from Oxford to broaden their experience through practical studies in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>

Father had no interest in politics, and so was effective in helping many. There were times in his life, because of his friendship with the leaders of China, when he was asked if he was a Communist. His answer was, “No, I am not. Even if I were to want to join the party, I don’t qualify, as I’m a capitalist.”

After the Second World War, the civil war between the Nationalists under Chiang Kaishek and the Communists under Mao Zedong began in earnest in China. In a way, Father retreated to Hong Kong. He looked upon Hong Kong as a Chinese colony in a period of British management, and believed he could be just as useful in working towards the improvement of the life of the population there. From then on, he concentrated on

Hong Kong, but he never forgot his roots in China, and waited until he could be of help to China again. At the same time, he always acted as a responsible citizen of the world.

Every year, on October 1, the People's Republic of China celebrated National Day. In the 1950s, Father was the first and only non-Communist in Hong Kong to receive an invitation to attend the celebration.<sup>2</sup> As far as he was concerned, not only his friendships were important to him, but also his special and unique closeness to the leaders of China, which could bring about a better life for the people of Hong Kong. He realized how dependent Hong Kong was on China, not only as an entrepôt, but also for its food and water supply.

With the influx of refugees from China after 1949, the water supply in Hong Kong became insufficient. Hong Kong depended on rainwater collected in reservoirs during the rainy season and, although the number of reservoirs was increased, supply could not keep up with demand. Rationing of water began in the 1950s, but that could only be a temporary solution to the problem. Water was supplied a few hours per day, then every other day, and then once every three days. The decrease in rainfall in the early 1960s turned the water shortage into a crisis.

As always, when Hong Kong had a problem, Father regarded it as his own responsibility. His concerns and public appeals to save water were constantly reported in the newspapers. While Father appealed for water conservation, he also explained to the population the reasons for the shortage, and that the government was doing its best to solve the problem.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the only major long-term solution to the chronic shortage was to obtain water from China. Because Beijing did not recognize the legitimacy of the British presence in Hong Kong, Chinese leaders would not negotiate with London over Hong Kong issues. This meant that the Chinese in Hong Kong had to negotiate with the Chinese government. The job of negotiating fell to Father, who was the only person in Hong Kong with access to the leaders in China.

The Xinhua News Agency, also known as the New China News Agency, had maintained a branch in Hong Kong since 1947 and acted as the unofficial Chinese consulate there. In the early 1950s, the director was Lian Weilin, a good friend of Father. The idea of obtaining water from China was discussed, and Lian was the go-between, with Father and Sir Tsun Nin Chau negotiating for Hong Kong, and Tao Zhou (first



secretary), and Chen Yu (governor of Guangdong Province), negotiating for China.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1963, Premier Zhou Enlai allowed tankers to go up the Pearl River daily to supply water to Hong Kong. At the same time, the Chinese government ordered a feasibility study for transporting water to Hong Kong from the East River in Guangdong Province, in order to solve future problems of water shortage there.

While Father was in the midst of discussions, there was fear that Hong Kong would run out of water completely. On May 31, 1963, Father made a public appeal to save water, while he explained that transporting water from China was only a temporary measure that could not solve the problem completely. He also said that talks with China were under way to bring about a permanent solution.<sup>5</sup> The shortage had become so severe that, starting June 1, 1963, water could only be supplied for four hours every four days in the heavily populated areas, and three hours every four days in the less populated areas.<sup>6</sup>

On April 23, 1964, agreements were signed between the Hong Kong government and the Water Works Department of Guangdong, and work began on the building of conduits from the East River to reservoirs in Shenzhen.<sup>7</sup> From there water could be piped to Hong Kong. In January 1965, Father was interviewed by *Wah Kiu Yat Po* about his hopes for the New Year. Besides wishing for the prosperity of the citizens of Hong Kong, he looked forward to the completion of the water project, scheduled for March 1 of that year.<sup>8</sup>

The project was finished in January 1965, and by March 1965 it started to supply water to Hong Kong, 60 million cubic metres<sup>9</sup> per year. By summer, two-thirds of the water consumed in Hong Kong was coming from the East River.<sup>10</sup> My parents were the only people from Hong Kong who attended the opening of the facilities in Shenzhen. Sir Tsun Nin Chau had wanted to attend but was not allowed by the British government.<sup>11</sup> No one could have stopped Father.

However, in 1967, the water supply to Hong Kong was interrupted during the riots brought about by the Cultural Revolution. That summer, the rainfall was below normal. The agreement with China was for approximately 68 million cubic metres plus an additional 8 million requested by the Water Authority, to be used between October 1, 1966 and June 30, 1967. By the beginning of June, this amount had already been drawn

from the system in Hong Kong. By June 28, a request for an additional 9 million cubic metres for the month of July had still not been answered by China. Until the request was approved, Mr. Michael Wright, director of public works, announced that the supply of water would have to be reduced from eight hours each day at the beginning of June to four hours on alternate days, starting on June 29.<sup>12</sup> Under the existing agreement with China, the new water supply would not begin until October 1.

By July 1967, the water shortage was so severe that supply to the population was further reduced to four hours every four days, starting July 13.<sup>13</sup> No one really knew why the request for more water from China was not answered. One can only guess that, because of the turmoil caused by the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government was in no condition to look after the needs of the population of Hong Kong.

By the end of the 1960s, life in Hong Kong had returned to normal. There were two subsequent phases of redevelopment of the water supply from the East River. The first one started in 1976 and finished in 1978, and a second phase started in 1981, increasing the supply to 660 million cubic metres of water to Hong Kong annually, which solved the water supply problem for Hong Kong once and for all.

During the 1960s, Father's relationship with China was viewed by some with jealousy and others with suspicion. Although he helped solve the water crisis,<sup>14</sup> some people accused Father of negotiating for the benefit of China.<sup>15</sup> The colonial government needed him when it was necessary, but, at the same time, expected him to stay away from China. That caused a great deal of conflict between Governor David Trench (1964–71) and Father. Father had built long-term relationships with people in China and he was loyal to his friends. In the case of the water crisis, if it had not been for China's help, Hong Kong would have ceased to be a viable place in which to live.

Father believed that, as a Chinese, he had the right to visit friends and relatives in China as long as he was allowed into the country. After all, he was a free man. When the Hong Kong government demanded that he stop his visits to China and that Mother should stop visiting her relatives, I can only imagine the fireworks. David K.P. Li (chairman of the Bank of East Asia), who used to see Father at least once a week, told me that Father, while pro-British, was fed up with the abuses of the colonial government towards the Chinese population. Father had no respect for

Governor Trench, whom he believed was not qualified for the position of governor.<sup>16</sup> He believed that Trench used the Chinese and at the same time treated them badly. Arguments ensued, and Father decided to resign from all his voluntary positions with the Hong Kong government.<sup>17</sup>

Up to that point, Father had been expected by everyone to be the next in line to be knighted by the Queen. In preparation for the celebration of the event, Mother bought a beautiful blue vase which was decorated with a deer, a pine tree, and a monkey holding a peach, signifying officialdom, wealth and long life. Then Father gave her the news of his resignation.

When my parents returned from a trip to Madagascar on June 13, 1965, they were met at the airport by a number of unofficial members of the Legislative Council. A letter accepting Father's resignation was handed to him by Y.K. Kan.<sup>18</sup> By 1966, Father had resigned from all his voluntary positions with the Hong Kong government. His resignations meant that he was no longer given any official recognition for anything he did, but they did not change his desire to help the people of Hong Kong. From then on, he represented himself instead of the Hong Kong government.

When David K.P. Li went to London subsequently to inquire why Father had not received a knighthood after all that he had done for Hong Kong, he was told that Father had been blacklisted by certain members of the colonial government.<sup>19</sup>

Father built good relations with the People's Republic of China, not only because he had many old friends in the government, but also because he knew very well that Hong Kong had to return to China one day, and he wanted to pave the road for a smooth transition. As he told me many times, "There must not be any fighting. The transition must be peaceful and beneficial to everyone." The leaders in Beijing knew of Father's sincerity and had great respect for him. Father believed that the people of Hong Kong had to rule Hong Kong one day, and that final decisions about their future could not be left to London or Beijing.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, he did not live to see the peaceful transition of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Father and Uncle Quo Wai were the first people from Hong Kong to know about Deng Xiaoping's policy of "one country, two systems" and his fifty-year plan for Hong Kong. On one of Father's trips to China with Uncle Quo Wai in the early 1970s, Father was called into a room to be given special information. He said, "Quo Wai, you come in too. I want

you to hear what's being said."<sup>21</sup> Father was given the assurance that business would continue as usual after the change of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

When my parents visited us in Toronto at the beginning of the 1970s, Father and I had a discussion about China. It was his view that China had had its share of bad times for the last two centuries, but that the twenty-first century belonged to China and I would live to see China strong again. I realized how very concerned he had always been about China and the Chinese people.

Father had always maintained that there was a great difference between the relationship of the governments of Hong Kong and China, and that of the populations of Hong Kong and China. In a speech he gave in June 1982 in Frankfurt, Germany, at the International Conference on Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, he said:

There was no doubt that the strained relationship between the Hong Kong Government and the Government of China, more apparent than real, was largely due to the short-sightedness of the former Colonial Cadet Officers and to the policy of the then Colonial Office in London, but not so between the Chinese of Hong Kong and the Chinese Government.

He was referring to the 1960s. He noted improvements under governor Sir Murray MacLehose in the 1970s:

The relationship between China and Hong Kong started to improve steadily during his term of office. This improvement is due, in large measure, to his foresight and great administrative ability.<sup>22</sup>

The 1970s were the years in which Father helped to build a bridge between Hong Kong and China. Having made the break with the colonial government, he could no longer be criticized by it for his actions. Those were the years when business people in Hong Kong did not invest in or travel to China. In fact, mainland China was a place to be avoided.

Because of Father's wish for a smooth transition, dialogue was necessary. In order to help bring the two sides (Hong Kong and China) together, Father held a spring feast every Chinese New Year, inviting all



the prominent members of the business community in Hong Kong, members of the Hong Kong government, as well as his foreign friends who might wish to make friends with China, to meet representatives of China. Because of Father's prestige, everyone came. By so doing, he was able to build friendships that continue to bring prosperity to all.

Former Director Lian Weilin of the Xinhua News Agency (1970s), told me that he would have liked to contact those in the business circles in Hong Kong, as well as the legislative and executive councillors, but, "If I had sent out the invitations, no one would turn up. When your father did, everyone came."<sup>23</sup> Father's spring feast at the Lee Gardens Hotel was like a who's who in the colony. It became one of the most important annual events in Hong Kong.

At Father's spring feast, spouses were not included. It was generally known to be a party for men only, although female councillors were invited. Anna Li, Father's secretary, was required to help, but she had to leave before dinner started. It was reported in a celebrity magazine that a foreign friend of Father arrived in Hong Kong for the party with his wife, only to be told at the Lee Gardens Hotel that spouses were not included. He had to take his wife back to the hotel and return to the party.<sup>24</sup>

One year we happened to be in Hong Kong when Father held his spring feast. Neville was invited, but I was not. Father asked me to take our boys to see the magic show at the Lee Theatre! Even though Father always thought of this as an event for men only, after he died, Mother, who had never taken part in the spring feast, continued to hold it for him for a number of years. If Father only knew!

Like all Chinese, Father frequently went back to our ancestral village, which was also the first area in China he helped to develop after the war. The first thing he did in Garlieu was to give money for the building of a new bridge over the river on which he had travelled as a child, when he and Grandfather brought Great-grandfather's body in a boat for burial. When I went back to the village with my family in the early 1990s, that was the first thing the villagers were proud to show us.

During our first visit in Garlieu, we were also shown the school buildings and the playground that Father and Second Uncle had donated money to build. We were also shown a small hat factory which Father had helped the villagers to start. It consisted of a very large room, clean, well lit and well organized. By the time we visited the village the second time,



the hats they were making included well-known labels from overseas. The villagers were proud of their achievements.

Over the years, Father and his brothers helped build hospitals and schools in the city of Sunwui. By so doing, they were acting like generations of Chinese in the past, by continuing to remember where they came from, and offering help to those in their ancestral home town. In honour of Father, Mother was presented with a gold key to the city of Sunwui in 1992, making her an honorary citizen. In 1993, Mother was also presented with a gold key to the city of Hoiping, where Great-grandfather originally came from.

Because of my parents' frequent travels in China, Father was able to talk knowledgeably about the country. He Mingsi of the Xinhua News Agency, who often accompanied my parents to China, was impressed by Father's inquisitiveness. He was interested not only in the development of the cities, but also of the outlying areas of the vast country.

In 1977, my parents went on an extensive trip through western China, visiting sights in Gansu Province and Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The following January, Father gave a talk, complete with slides, to the Chinese Bankers' Association. He not only showed the sights, including the hydro-electric plants, but he also brought pieces of rocks from the area.<sup>25</sup> Father always had a special interest in the beauty of rocks. His enthusiasm in everything he did was infectious.

When my parents visited us in 1978, they told us about their trip to western China and gave us photographs of their visit. The one I liked best was a picture of Father on a dromedary. My parents had been invited to dine with the local chieftains in Ürümqi, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, who had served them their best. It was the first time they had ever eaten fresh *fat choy*, generally known as hair vegetable because it looks like hair. It is always used in dishes for Chinese New Year for good luck, because *fat choy* sounds the same as "prosperity" in Cantonese. The majority of Chinese do not know where *fat choy* comes from, and generally presume that it is a seaweed. *Fat choy* is actually a desert plant. Being special guests, my parents were also served the local delicacy — sheep's eyes. Mother said, "When I saw the head on my plate with those eyes staring at me, I immediately felt sick!"

Father also promoted cultural exchanges. In 1968, during an excavation in the Man Chen District in Hebei Province, the tomb belonging

to Prince Ching (Jing) of Chung Shan (Zhongshan) (personal name Liu Sheng) of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 24 C.E.) was discovered.<sup>26</sup> Inside was the body of a princess dressed in a garment of jade threaded together by gold filaments. This spectacular garment, 188 centimetres long, had never been shown outside of China.

In 1978, Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao* wanted to put on an exhibition of this jade garment in Hong Kong, together with other funerary objects, such as a gold-plated bronze Zhang Hsin Palace lamp from the same tomb, and bronze horses and chariots from a tomb from the East Han dynasty excavated in 1969.<sup>27</sup> Fei was not able to organize the exhibition and asked Father for help. Father asked Henry Fok to hold the exhibition in Star House and organized the insurance, security and ticket sales. It was a large exhibition which occupied three floors. It was the first time such an exhibition had ever been mounted in Hong Kong, and the attendance was overwhelming. At the same time, it gave China an archaeological presence in the colony.<sup>28</sup>

It was not uncommon for Chinese government officials to send special gifts, such as fruit from a particular area of China, to Father through Xinhua News Agency. What they sent was often not available commercially in Hong Kong, and Father was always proud of these presents. During Chinese New Year, it would be peonies and kumquat plants and small tangerines. This show of respect continued towards Mother after Father died.

One day, in the 1970s, a call came from Xinhua News Agency to say that they had a gift of “*yut lup leichee*,” meaning a basket of litchi, which had been specially sent from China for Father. They asked the office to send a large car to pick it up. Anna, Father’s secretary, wondered why a large car had to be sent for “*yut nup leichee*,” which meant one litchi. She thought the person from Xinhua was speaking in slang by changing the “n” sound in the word “*nup*” to an “l” which was a common habit among young Cantonese.<sup>29</sup> However, she did send a large car as requested, and when the car came back, it held a huge basket of litchi. The term “*lup*,” which meant “basket,” was no longer commonly used by the younger generation, and Anna had been confused.

Father helped a great number of people in his life, and he often received gifts from them, but there were one or two people who were jealous of Father and they would send him clocks, which Anna found most

objectionable. According to Cantonese folklore, giving a clock means that you want that person to die. But Father was not superstitious. He said, "If they want to give these to me, it's fine."<sup>30</sup>

As Father was very well known and was the first prominent person from Hong Kong to travel extensively in China after the Second World War, over the years some young men from the mainland claimed to be his sons. What was not reported in the newspapers was the fact that Mother usually accompanied him, and that he was always escorted by officials from the Chinese government. So he ignored this nuisance. (In a similar way, young women in Hong Kong claimed to be Mother's god-daughters, since they could not very well claim to be her biological children.) It became a joke in the office whenever the staff heard about another claimant. Because of the way Father conducted his life, Grand-uncle Lee Shu Yuen and the office staff agreed that if it had been anybody else, the claims might be credible, but not for Father. The claimants should have done their homework first.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1970s, Father became good friends with Yao Kang<sup>32</sup> of John Swire & Sons (H.K.) Ltd. Even though the Lee family had had a good business relationship with the company since 1948, the two men only became close friends when Yao became a Master in the Masonic Lodge in 1972. They often sat together at the Masonic meetings, and Father came to trust him. Yao went with Father to the Masonic Lodge in Japan that year, and Father often called Yao to deal with both personal and business matters.

Yao, who had worked for many years in China, had established good relationships there, and spoke many Chinese dialects. Father often invited him to participate whenever there were visitors from China in Hong Kong, be it for breakfast, lunch or dinner. In this manner, Yao got to know people like the governor of Guangdong and vice-premiers and ministers from China while they were visiting Hong Kong unofficially.<sup>33</sup> Yao was impressed by Father's willingness to help others and by his extensive connections with top Chinese government officials.

In 1978, China opened up for business. The Chinese government invited the Swire Group to visit Beijing, since Swire was an old, established foreign company that had operated in China since the 1800s. When the name of the representative from the company was submitted, Father

said no, Yao should be the one to represent Swire. Yao went, even though he was getting on in years and thought a younger person should represent the company. Father trusted Yao, and believed he would do justice to both China and Swire.

One day in 1981, Father phoned Yao Kang and asked him to keep the following Wednesday clear because he needed him to look after a minister from China for the whole day. He asked Yao to plan a program for this man who was an engineer by training. At eight-thirty in the morning on that day, along with Hon Chiu at the Lee Gardens Hotel, Yao was introduced to Jiang Zemin who was then minister of electronic industries. Father said to him, "Y.K., you better take good care of this man. He has great potential."

After breakfast, Yao showed Jiang the airport and, in particular, the maintenance department, the facilities of Cathay Pacific (owned by Swire) and public housing in Kowloon, in all of which Jiang showed great interest. Yao also took him to lunch, and spoke to him about finance and commerce in general. Father thought Yao was the perfect person to take Jiang around since they were both from Shanghai and would have a lot in common.

Yao found out that Jiang's vice-minister, Wei Mingyi, had been Yao's room-mate at Beijing University; in fact, it was Wei who had originally advised Yao in 1948 to take the job with Swire in England. After that visit, Jiang became mayor of Shanghai, and Yao visited him and they became good friends. After the June 4, 1989 incident at Tiananmen Square, Jiang became party secretary, and Wei Mingyi became the president of CITIC (China International Trust and Investment Corporation).<sup>34</sup> To this day, Yao Kang thinks that Father had vision and always gives him credit for being able to see potential in others.

In 1979, Sir Murray MacLehose was the first governor of Hong Kong to be invited to visit Beijing and tour western China. At the end of his visit, he attended the Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train<sup>35</sup> ceremony in Guangzhou. My parents, who were visiting Hainan Island, accompanied by the director of Xinhua News Agency, Wang Kuang,<sup>36</sup> were also invited to attend the ceremony. A special plane was sent to Hainan to take them to Guangzhou, but they almost did not make it because of high winds. The plane had to take off due west instead of north, but finally landed in Zhao-



qing, and from there they made it to Guangzhou.<sup>37</sup> The event was very important to Father because it signalled the beginning of communication in earnest between Britain and China.<sup>38</sup>

Not only did Father build relationships between Hong Kong and China, but his international network also extended to Europe and Japan. He worked with N.M. Rothschild and Sons of London, A.P. Møller of Denmark, Yamaichi Securities of Japan and many others. Foreign investments poured into the colony and eventually into China. His prestige rose while he kept busy looking after his many businesses and starting new ones. Once there was friendship, dialogue and business followed. And when China opened up for business in the late 1970s, Father took the lead in the first joint venture.

By the 1970s, Father had attained the respect and trust of different segments of society in Hong Kong, including members of the government as well as the leaders in China. He was regarded internationally as one of the “decision makers” in Hong Kong.<sup>39</sup> He was satisfied that the Hong Kong government was working on behalf of the population. These were important years, when he helped to lay the foundation for a peaceful transfer of sovereignty, both in business links between Hong Kong and China and in the structure of the future government of Hong Kong.

He was regarded by many in Hong Kong as the ideal person to be the chief executive when Hong Kong returned to China on July 1, 1997. Whenever I heard that mentioned, I always pointed out that, by 1997, Father would have been ninety-two years old.

I am sure that Father was able to work at the age of seventy-eight like a young man of thirty-five because he was full of ideas, and was always starting new projects. By the beginning of the 1980s, he had planned two new projects in China: to improve the international telephone system in Guangzhou, and to build a double railway line between Shenzhen and Guangzhou. These unfortunately could not be realized before his death.<sup>40</sup>

By January 1982, China was the largest supplier of goods to Hong Kong, overtaking Japan for the first time in recent history. Father believed that the increase in trade between Hong Kong and China called for improvements in China’s transportation system:



To meet the ever-increasing volume of trade, the means of transportation between Hong Kong and Guangdong must be improved. In order to reduce delays in the transit of goods and to reduce the cost of transportation and handling, the Guangzhou-Shenzhen railway must be double-tracked to link up with Kowloon as an order of first priority. Hong Kong is the only deep-sea port with all modern facilities on the South China coast and an increasing number of containers will flow in both directions between Hong Kong and Guangzhou. This traffic must, in the near future, be carried by rail....The double tracking of the railway could be carried out with comparative ease and completed quickly at reasonable cost — to the benefit of Hong Kong, China and the world.<sup>41</sup>

The international phone system was so much improved that, when our family attended the grand opening of the Garden Hotel in Guangzhou in 1985, and one of our sons could not be with us, I was able to call direct from our hotel room to Toronto without any problem. I was very impressed.

When China was opened for joint ventures with foreign capital, Father immediately responded. In taking the lead, he wanted to give the Chinese government credibility. Since he knew that the hotels in China were all substandard, he planned to build the largest and most beautiful hotel in the country. In the late 1970s, the Chinese Communist Party was inexperienced in dealing with joint ventures, and Father's was the first. It became extremely trying for him because of endless negotiations, red tape, delays, and the resulting escalation in cost.

Father had originally wanted to build a hotel in Beijing, but was asked to build one on Hainan Island instead. He realized then that those in the Chinese government involved in this project had no concept of business. Hainan Island in the 1970s did not have the infrastructure to support a project of that magnitude.

Instead, Father chose a prime location in Guangzhou, close to the train station which would be convenient for business people coming to the Guangzhou Trade Fair. The site was near Beiyunshan (the same hill where the Japanese trained their troops to invade Hong Kong in 1941),

which had an important airfield, and was a high-security defence location for Guangzhou. Father was asked to build a hotel with anti-aircraft guns on the roof and a bomb shelter underneath. It again took time and patience while he and Yang Shangkun, who was then the vice-chairman of the Military Commission, talked to those who had made the request in Beijing, and the demands were dropped. The hotel, however, was built with its own emergency generator, which was and still is very necessary.

So the Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Limited was formed and a joint venture agreement<sup>42</sup> was signed between the company and the Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company on March 28, 1980.<sup>43</sup> The development site, covering 52,600 square metres, was located south of Guangzhou Baiyun Guest House, on what had been vegetable farmland. The Garden Hotel<sup>44</sup> was to be built by Guangzhou Pearl River Foreign Investment Construction Company in two phases — 1,300 rooms to be completed in the first phase and 940 rooms in the second — at an estimated cost of about US\$50,000 per room.<sup>45</sup> The project included a hotel, a conference centre and an apartment tower.

Father raised the capital among his friends and from the banks, with himself as the major shareholder. Many of his friends rallied behind him. Swire was asked to participate, and even though it was totally against Swire's principles to take part in this type of investment, Yao Kang persuaded the company to become a minor shareholder. A.P. Møller, the Danish company which continues to this day to have a close relationship with the various businesses of the Lee family, invested in the company because of Father. The total amount raised was HK\$700 million.<sup>46</sup>

I remember the enthusiasm with which Father talked about the project during my parents' visit to Toronto. It was to be a five-star hotel, not only the largest in China, but also one of the largest and most beautiful in the world, and it was to be his gift to China. On December 27, 1980, Yang Shangkun laid the foundation stone for the Garden Hotel. Father expressed the hope that this would contribute in a small way to the modernization of China.<sup>47</sup>

The architect for the Garden Hotel was Szeto Wai, Father's friend who had designed the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Chinese parties in the joint venture<sup>48</sup> requested that all the rooms be almost identi-

cal. C.T. Wu and his son were drawn into the planning, because Father had wanted them to help with the future management of the hotel. They objected to making all the rooms the same and insisted that there should be many different configurations of rooms in a modern hotel. They also objected to the design of a revolving restaurant because they felt that it was not suitable for the location. All this caused delays in the construction. Corrections were made to construct the rooms in different sizes, and suites were added to make the hotel more marketable. But the revolving restaurant remained. Unfortunately, the arguments led to bad feelings between C.T. Wu and his son on one side, and the hotel group on the other.<sup>49</sup>

By early 1983, because of bad financial management, there were huge cost overruns. The problems of the construction became obvious, and it was very stressful for Father.<sup>50</sup> When he passed away in July, Beijing requested that Mother take over the chairmanship of Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Limited.<sup>51</sup> Xu Jiatao, the newly appointed director of Xinhua News Agency, organized a dinner for the representatives from China, and Mother agreed to become the chairman. Now it was up to her to solve the financial crisis.

Despite the fact that Swire was only a minor shareholder, Yao Kang took the lead in helping to solve the problem. He told the representative from the Chinese side of the hotel company that Swire would raise sufficient additional capital, on condition that the company could send auditors into China to check the books. But when the auditors went in, they could not get the information they needed. There were no books to show how the US\$100 million had been spent. In order for the project to carry on, all the original investors were asked to put in additional capital, not only because of China's appeal for foreign investment but also out of respect for Father's memory. Swire took the lead in putting in additional capital, and also made up the difference when another investor failed to put in his share. The accountant for the company was fired, and the hotel proceeded to completion.<sup>52</sup>

On October 28, 1984, the hotel opened for business. Among the major tenants were the offices of the American Consulate and the Japanese Consulate,<sup>53</sup> and their residences were in the twin tower.<sup>54</sup> My parents'

old friend, Reiko Ogata, became the liaison in the Garden Hotel for the Japanese government and businesses. She later worked in promotion for the hotel in Tokyo until 1988.

The grand opening of the hotel was planned for August 28, 1985, and guests were invited to stay for three days. We flew to Hong Kong to join the group for the celebration. Many cars of the through train from Hong Kong to Guangzhou were booked for guests, and so the party really started at the train station in Hong Kong. We arrived to a red-carpet welcome. Just as I expected, the hotel was not only grand, but also absolutely beautiful. When I saw Mother making her speech in Mandarin, I felt very proud, and wished that Father could have been there too.

In 1989, after the June 4 incident in Tiananmen Square, all businesses in China suffered. The Garden Hotel had no income, yet it still had interest payments to make to the syndicated loan.<sup>55</sup> It faced foreclosure by the banks. Mother decided to go to Beijing to seek help. An official visit was planned to see President Yang Shangkun, who was a pragmatic person and had great respect for my parents.

In early 1990, accompanied by a senior official from Xinhua News Agency, Mother paid a visit to President Yang, who invited her to dinner at Diaoyutai.<sup>56</sup> Mother told the president that the investors had come to the end of the road, so the choice was for the Chinese government to take over the hotel, or else it would have to be closed. President Yang said to her, "The Garden Hotel will never close, Mrs. Lee, don't worry."

A month after Mother's visit, the Bank of China called to say that the Garden Hotels Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. had an unsecured line of credit of US\$25 million. Mother's "rescue" mission had been successful. Fortunately, in the end the line of credit did not have to be used, because business gradually returned to normal, and within a few years, the entire loan was paid off.<sup>57</sup>

In Father's later years, he was sometimes asked why he put money in the Bank of China. The bank's interest rate was only 4 percent, whereas he could get a much higher return at other financial institutions. His answer was, "I don't intend to take the money out. China is my country."<sup>58</sup>

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Haffner, *The Craft in the East*, p. 422.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> At the same time, world-class reservoirs continued to be built, and desalinization of sea water was being carried out.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, May through June 1963.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31, 1963.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, April 23, 1964.
- <sup>8</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, January 3, 1965.
- <sup>9</sup> One cubic metre equals approximately 220 gallons.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, April 21, 1965.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- <sup>12</sup> *Hong Kong Standard*, June 28, 1967.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, July 13, 1967.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Times*, July 8, 1983.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996. She remained a secretary in the family company, Lee Hysan Estate, until her retirement at the age of sixty-five. Father used to give her a ride home every day after work, and he would tell her about confidential matters which he would not repeat in his office.
- <sup>17</sup> These included member of the Legislative Council, member of the Executive Council, member of the Advisory Committee on Corruption and member of the Fisheries Development Loan Fund Committee.
- <sup>18</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, June 14, 1965.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with David K.P. Li, Hong Kong, November 1996.
- <sup>20</sup> Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze" (Remembering R.C. Lee), *Ta Kung Pao*, July 16, 1983.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Sir Quo Wai Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996. The person who divulged this information cannot be named because he is still living.
- <sup>22</sup> Richard Charles Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China," address given at the International Conference on the Economic Opportunities in Hong Kong, held at the Gravenbruch-Kempinski Hotel, Frankfurt, June 14-15, 1982.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Lian Weilin, Guangzhou, November 1996.
- <sup>24</sup> *Celebrity Monthly*, January 1979, p. 24.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, January 11, 1978.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter from Prof. Ma Lin, November 27, 1997.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, March 24, 1978.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Prof. Ma Lin, Hong Kong, June 1997.



<sup>29</sup> Young Chinese tend to slur the distinction between the “n” and “l” sounds, and thus cause great confusion.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, April 1995.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Yao Kang joined the Shanghai office of Swire in 1948, straight out of university. He was sent to England to train in the cadet program. He was the first local to be picked for this program which was usually reserved for Oxbridge graduates. In 1951, when the Korean War started, Swire was no longer willing to send its specialists to China. Yao was asked if he would like to go back. In his early twenties, he became the manager for Swire's China insurance operations, based in Shanghai, with branch offices in Tianjin, Qingdao, Hankou, Xiamen and Shantou. In 1953, he recommended that Swire get out of China, because he felt there was no future. The company followed his advice and withdrew from China. Yao arrived in Hong Kong at Christmas 1953. By the time Yao retired, he was chairman of six Swire subsidiary companies.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>34</sup> CITIC is the best-regarded and the most international company owned by Beijing, with twenty subsidiaries in China and abroad and a total of 26,000 employees. Its assets total US\$5 billion. Abroad, the company concentrates on development of natural resources and communications. An example is Citifor in Seattle, Washington, one of the major suppliers of timber in the northwest United States. Other business interests include China Light & Power, Dragon Air, Hong Kong Telecom, trading, distribution and property, mainly in Hong Kong, Macau and mainland China. It is a publicly traded company listed on the Hong Kong stock exchange. The friendship between Yao and Wei is “the reason why Swire Pacific is so close to CITIC. They have many joint ventures.” Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Passengers could get on the train in Hong Kong and go through immigration in Guangzhou when they arrived, without being stopped at border check-points.

<sup>36</sup> He was director from 1978 to 1982.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Wang Kuang, Guangzhou, November 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, “The Importance of Hong Kong to China.”

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Father from H.A. Washcheck, senior vice-president of the Bank of America, September 4, 1980.

<sup>40</sup> Fei Yiming, “Mian Huai Li Ming Ze.”

<sup>41</sup> Lee, “The Importance of Hong Kong to China.”

<sup>42</sup> The agreement stipulated that the ownership of the hotel would revert to China after fifteen years. This was later extended to twenty years.

<sup>43</sup> A Supplemental Agreement was signed on May 3, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> It is referred to as Garden Guest House in the Joint Venture Agreement.

<sup>45</sup> Joint Venture Agreement on the Construction and Operation of Garden Guest House in Guangzhou between Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company and Garden Hotels (Holdings) Limited, March 28, 1980.

<sup>46</sup> Supplemental Agreement between Guangzhou Lingnan Enterprises Company and Garden Hotels (Holdings) Limited in respect of the joint venture for the construction and operation of the Garden Hotel, May 3, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, December 27, 1980.

<sup>48</sup> This apparently was insisted on by the Chinese side of the joint venture. Interview with C.T. Wu, Toronto, Spring 1995.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> By its completion, the cost was \$1.5 billion, an overrun of 80 percent. Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>51</sup> She was, therefore, vice-chairman of the board of the Garden Hotel, Guangzhou.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>53</sup> It was Father's plan to establish a liaison office in Tokyo which would be run by Reiko Ogata.

<sup>54</sup> In 1997, the Japanese Consulate was still there, and even though the American Consulate has moved out, their Cultural Centre is still in the Garden Hotel complex. Interview with Reiko Ogata, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>55</sup> \$700 million.

<sup>56</sup> Chinese government guest house in Beijing where senior government officials entertain V.I.P. guests. The name in Chinese depicts a platform where the emperor did his fishing inside the inner palace.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.

## CHAPTER 25

### The Businessman

Victory in war and profit in business”<sup>1</sup> was how Father once explained the meaning of our surname “Lee” in Chinese to a reporter from the *South China Morning Post*. Father certainly had a winner’s mentality. However, he never could be a “successful” businessman in the sense of someone who is completely profit-oriented. People often said that Father could have been a lot wealthier than he was, but he had a different agenda. He was a socially responsible businessman for whom people came first and profit second. He believed that money ought to be used to benefit people and not to pamper oneself. When he was interviewed in 1975 by Berta Manson for a series called “The Empire Builders” in the *South China Morning Post*, he lamented that the rich industries were doing “too little for the lot of Hong Kong’s underprivileged youth.”<sup>2</sup>

Many people in Hong Kong had become billionaires overnight through speculation.<sup>3</sup> It was a practice Father abhorred, because it upset economic stability and drove prices up, making life difficult for ordinary people. He considered speculators the scourge of mankind. Although the Lee family owned many properties in Hong Kong, he cringed whenever property prices were driven sky high, because it meant that many people would not be able to afford a place to live.<sup>4</sup> He spoke very publicly on this issue on many occasions, and certainly practised what he preached.

Investment, not speculation, was the key to responsible and good business for Father. Father believed “a company must have a solid foundation and expand over the years....The best improvement is long, gradual and steady.”<sup>5</sup> In a speech in 1982, he said:

Such business activities [speculation], which may enrich a few individuals, bring no real wealth to the community and provide little employment to the local population. Activities of a highly speculative nature cannot be of benefit in a new “Hong Kong Order.”<sup>6</sup>

It was something I have learnt from him. With speculation, one can make a great deal of money overnight, but one can also lose everything, and many people are destroyed along the way. Investment to Father also meant investment in people, providing jobs and improving people's standard of living. Many young people nowadays might think this philosophy belongs to the dinosaur age, but I still believe it is the basis of a sound and stable society.

Father tried to instil his belief in others. Anna, his secretary, told me about an incident in the 1970s concerning the purchase of condominiums. The procedure for purchasing condos in Hong Kong was and still is quite different from that in other parts of the world. People have to line up for numbers just to obtain the right to purchase. Many people go without sleep just to get to the front of the line. One day, Father told all the office staff that, if they were interested in purchasing condos in one of the new developments, owned by someone he knew, he could get them low numbers (meaning they would have priority), but they had to promise him that they were purchasing condos to live in themselves, and not for speculation. Anna said, "I missed a chance to make some money, but I didn't dare disobey your father!"

Father also did not believe in bargaining because he felt that everyone had a right to make a living. If the price is not right, you do not buy. I remember being with him and some of my parents' friends at a Chinese New Year bazaar. A friend of Mother wanted to buy a budding peach tree<sup>7</sup> for her home and bargained for a lower price, but she was stopped by Father. He believed that people should be able to make a bit more money around Chinese New Year.

Father was known as a thorough person. To whatever he took on he gave a great deal of time and effort. As company chairman — and he was chairman of many companies — he would check the annual reports carefully and make corrections before they went to print, which normally was not his responsibility.<sup>8</sup> And yet, as an entrepreneur with a lot of ideas and great connections, he was not interested in the details of operations. He was more excited in ideas and making deals than in the bottom line, so at times, he trusted the wrong people in management, and certain businesses did not do well for him.<sup>9</sup> Because he was an honourable man, he expected others to be the same. Once he trusted someone, he would continue to trust that person regardless of warnings from others that the person was

working against him. At times like these, it was very upsetting for Mother, who could see what was going on, but was powerless to do anything about it.

This was true of his experience with Kowloon Taxi, which he started soon after the war. Father was probably one of the first people to buy diesel-fuelled Mercedes-Benzes as taxis. But Kowloon Taxi eventually went downhill because of bad management, and was finally sold when the Cross Harbour tunnel was built.<sup>10</sup>

I often heard Father say that he was not interested in being the wealthiest man in Hong Kong; with his connections, he could have been. This does not sound like the statement of a businessman. He was a thrifty person, and money did not have great significance to him personally. Like most members of the Lee family, Father never wore flashy clothes or drove fancy cars. He told me that, when Rolls-Royce first came to Hong Kong, and he was approached to buy one, his answer was, "I can't afford the ostentation." He would rather drive around in a Volkswagen Golf. And yet, at the same time, nothing would stop him from buying Mother precious jewels. Those probably were the only items on which he ever splurged.

In March 1960, Father led the Hong Kong Trade Mission to West Africa. On his return, he made suggestions to Hong Kong manufacturers about packaging, pricing, sizing and marketing. He recommended that shoe-boxes be improved because rats ate the Chinese glue made from rice flour that was used to make the boxes, that china-ware be shipped in wooden crates to prevent breakage, and that clothing sizes be standardized. He lamented that manufacturers had lost orders because of poor quality. He believed that Hong Kong products could command the same prices as Japanese products if they were well made, because there was a demand for them. He also suggested that all Hong Kong manufacturers get together to print a catalogue to make ordering easier for buyers.<sup>11</sup>

In 1963, Father was asked by the Hong Kong government to lead a delegation to the Frankfurt International Trade Fair that August. Since he had already been invited by the German government to tour Germany as their guest, he made arrangements to do both around the same time.

In July, when he made his first stop in London, he was handed a letter from St. James's Palace, inviting him to attend an investiture at Buckingham Palace on that Wednesday, July 24, to receive a CBE (Commander



of the British Empire) from the Queen. Since Mother was not with him on that trip, he invited two friends, Colonel Jack and Major General Tom Churchill, to accompany him to the palace. Everything had happened so suddenly that he had to rent a morning coat for the occasion.

It was Father's habit to make frequent trips to Europe. From London, he flew to Denmark to visit his friends, the Jebsens, in Aabenraa and at their cottage on Romo Island. Mother was not with him on that trip, and when she heard that Father went swimming in the frigid water of Als Fjord, she commented that Father still thought himself a young man.

From Romo Island, Father was then driven by another friend, Martin Schroter, to Hamburg, Germany, where he was taken to major industrial centres, escorted by officials of the German government, Helmut Kluge and Verner Walbroel. From there, Father flew to meet Uncle Quo Wai in Vienna, where they toured factories and hydro-electric stations in Austria. At the end of August, he led the trade delegation to Frankfurt. Father was a tireless learner.

In the 1960s, as many small factories sprouted up in Hong Kong, the availability of land became a problem. In March 1963, Father spoke in the Legislative Council, on behalf of the new and small factory owners, against the government's policy of forcing them off the land in order to sell it to developers. He said that the industries had obtained their licences to operate from the government, and should be protected. If the government wanted them to move, alternate locations ought to be provided at a reasonable rent. They should also be notified when the land they occupied was to be auctioned, as they had a right to put in a bid. He rejected the suggestion that small industries should be absorbed by the large ones, and stressed the importance of protecting hard-working small-industry owners who were the backbone of society.<sup>12</sup>

There were concerns during those years that Hong Kong was losing investments to other areas of the world. It was a problem that Father had often mentioned. In 1963, he suggested at the Legislative Council meeting that the inheritance tax be abolished. The tax collected that year only came to HK\$20 million, which was a fraction of the amount of investment lost to other jurisdictions because of it.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, his advice was not taken.

Besides helping other industrialists, Father was involved in industries himself. In 1964, he started Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products Ltd.

in Peng Chau, one of the islands off Hong Kong. The product from this factory was new to the colony. In the opening ceremony on December 21, Father proudly announced the establishment of this new industry for Hong Kong. The Honourable D.R. Holmes officiated at the opening and, in commemoration of the event, the board of Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products Ltd. promised to make an annual donation to provide for ten free places in two local schools for the children of Peng Chau.<sup>14</sup>

Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products used only the best supplies; for example, they purchased their steel from Nippon Steel Corporation, and hot rolled steel coils from Yawata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., both Japanese companies. Hong Kong Tube and Metal Products continued in operation until Father's death in 1983, at which time it was sold.

Although he was involved in many businesses, Father never lost his interest in engineering problems. Soon after the war, he suggested that the government build a tunnel through the mountain from Happy Valley to Aberdeen. At that time, he estimated that it would not cost a lot. However, the government was not interested. A tunnel was finally built at a much later date and at a huge cost.<sup>15</sup>

In 1964, the Legislative Council was planning to erect additional buildings for the British armed forces stationed in Hong Kong in areas such as Shek Kong in the New Territories. Father recommended that all buildings be designed so that they could be converted later to libraries, schools or offices with minor alterations. Thus, when the time came for them to be handed back by the British to the government of Hong Kong (Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong), they would remain valuable properties.<sup>16</sup> Father was already preparing Hong Kong for the change of sovereignty in 1997, and he did not want to see resources wasted.

Also in 1964, Father experimented with solar heating for hot water by building a contraption on the roof of Tower Court where we lived. The structure was made of canvas, and inside were six black tubes each six inches wide. The black tubes would absorb the heat of the sun and warm the water in the structure. It was the first solar heating system ever built in Hong Kong and cost only a hundred dollars. Although it was successful, and his efforts were reported in the media, it was never built for commercial use.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned earlier, crossing the harbour from Hong Kong to Kowloon was very inconvenient, especially by car, which meant having to line

up for the car ferry. Ever since 1955, there had been public discussions in Hong Kong about improving harbour crossings by building either a bridge or a tunnel. A bridge would be exposed to the weather, and might not be safe during the typhoon season. However, a tunnel would be a much more complicated engineering undertaking and would cost a great deal more. Public discussions on the subject continued for a number of years. It was not until May 1963 that the Hong Kong government made the decision against building a bridge, and discussions then focused on a tunnel.<sup>18</sup>

A tunnel between Hong Kong and Kowloon would put an end to the long line-ups at the Yaumatai Car Ferry. In those days, no one took a car across the harbour unless it was absolutely necessary, because it was a full-day excursion. Our family would cross with the car only for special family gatherings and for Chinese New Year. Most people crossed the harbour on foot by ferry and then hired a taxi or took the bus on the other side.

In 1963, Father, J.L. Marden of Wheelock Marden, the Honourable J.D. Clague and Lawrence Kadoorie formed the Victoria City Development Co. Ltd., the main objective of which was the building of a cross-harbour tunnel. The name was later changed to Cross-Harbour Tunnel Company Limited, Hong Kong. The original plan was to build a tunnel for both cars and pedestrians.<sup>19</sup> It was to have two lanes; the plan and the layout were sent to the colonial secretary and the Crown Lands and Survey Office in January 1964.<sup>20</sup>

By August 11, 1965, when approval for the construction of the tunnel was finally given by the Hong Kong government, the plan had changed. The tunnel would be for cars only. It would be open twenty-four hours a day even during typhoon season, and it would cost an estimated \$210 million. The Hong Kong government would be the owner of one quarter of the project.<sup>21</sup> Construction was to start the following fall.

When the right to build the tunnel was granted, Father worked very hard to find investors for the project. Most of the financing came from a British merchant investment banker.<sup>22</sup> During the 1960s, the economy was poor in Hong Kong, so it was difficult to persuade people to invest. Father and Lee Hysan Estate Co. were some of the original investors, together with Marden and the Kadoorie family. Father tried to convince the owner of the Yaumatai Car Ferry, Lau Ding Kwok, to invest in the

company, especially when the business of his ferry service would be affected by the building of a tunnel, but Lau declined, and he regretted it ever after.<sup>23</sup>

During the formation of the company, Father went to visit Fei Yiming of *Ta Kung Pao* to ask if he thought the timing was right to build the cross-harbour tunnel. I believe he meant the political timing. Fei's answer was that it would be absolutely necessary for the convenience of the citizens of Hong Kong, and he assured Father that Hong Kong's political stability would be maintained for a long time.<sup>24</sup>

During my parents' visit to us in Toronto in the early 1970s, Father told me how difficult it had been to get the cross-harbour tunnel under way. In the beginning, there was a problem in getting the Hong Kong government to provide financial support; however, when the government of France showed interest in injecting capital into the project, the Hong Kong government immediately became interested.

Being a civil engineer, Father always liked to get involved in construction, and he oversaw the engineering of the tunnel. Building a tunnel under the harbour in the 1960s was a monumental feat, although Hon Chiu told me, "Today, it is as easy as making duck soup!"<sup>25</sup> When the first section of the tunnel was completed, Father invited Fei Yiming to inspect it. The night before the tunnel was due to be opened for traffic, Father invited Fei again, this time to drive with him from Hong Kong to Kowloon. He explained the technical aspects of the construction to his friend, about air circulation and the prevention of water seepage.<sup>26</sup> Fei was most impressed by Father's complete involvement and his pride in this project.

When the tunnel was opened on August 2, 1972, traffic between Hong Kong and Kowloon was revolutionized.<sup>27</sup> It was no longer a big undertaking to cross between Hong Kong and Kowloon by car, and line-ups at the Yaumatai Car Ferry became a thing of the past. Business was not brisk in the beginning, because it cost five dollars for the crossing, but people soon appreciated the convenience and then there was no turning back. Subsequently, when the exchange rate of the HK dollar became very favourable against the pound sterling, the loan was quickly paid back and the company went on to making huge profits.<sup>28</sup>

During one of our trips home, when we were driving through the tunnel with our cousins from Kowloon to Hong Kong, one cousin said to me,



“Every time we pay five dollars to cross, two out of that goes into your father’s pocket!” I was sure she was exaggerating.

Another essential service for the population of Hong Kong was the telephone. In the 1960s, the Hong Kong telephone system was rather backward and needed much improvement. In January 1962, Father was appointed to the board of directors of the Hong Kong Telephone Company Limited by the chairman, H.R.M. Cleland. In 1965, Father himself became the chairman.<sup>29</sup>

In 1966, there were only three hundred thousand telephones lines in Hong Kong, or eight for every one hundred persons. At the same time, sixty thousand people were waiting in line for telephone service. That year, Father decided to expand the operations of the company by building more stations in different parts of Hong Kong, to make it possible to increase the number of telephones lines to 1.8 million. Cables were laid under the ocean in Southeast Asia to improve communications, and technical and management level personnel were hired to manage the increased demand. The profit that year went up to \$29 million.<sup>30</sup>

Because of his admiration for German engineering, Father decided to purchase German equipment to improve the performance of the telephone system. He was advised by Jardine Fleming<sup>31</sup> to use Swiss francs to fund the purchase. Unfortunately, the rate of exchange against the Hong Kong dollar appreciated the value many times, which made the purchase very expensive. Yet Father did not want to raise the telephone rate. This produced great controversy and Father had to shoulder the blame. David K.P. Li, whose father, Fook Su Li, was on the board, believed that Father had been badly advised.<sup>32</sup>

In 1969, despite the public outcry, the number of telephone lines had increased to five hundred thousand, which was 12.45 per one hundred persons, the second highest per capita in Asia after Japan. When satellite communications were established in Hong Kong that year, communications with other parts of the world were greatly improved. The most important work for the company in 1970 was the building of computerized connectors in the Lai Chi Kok station. When this was completed, it was the most advanced independent system in the world, able to service the New Territories as well as Hong Kong. In the technical department, almost two thousand employees were trained. Four Chinese engineers were sent to England for advanced training, and six were sent to Munich in



Germany for technical training. A school in Kwun Tong to train employees was scheduled to be finished by April 1971.<sup>33</sup>

During Father's term as chairman, it was discovered that there were a great many problems in the management of the company. Rumour had it that there were people within the company who were taking bribes, and that this problem went all the way up to the general manager, Charles Male.<sup>34</sup> Lydia Dunn, the present Baroness Dunn, was one of the people sent by the government to investigate. Unfortunately, the investigation could not proceed because Charles Male left for South Africa. Since there was no extradition treaty between South Africa and Hong Kong, he could not be brought back to answer questions.<sup>35</sup>

At that time, Father's office was on the twenty-fifth floor of the Prince's Building, and the telephone company was on the fourth floor. He was very much aware of the constant flurry of investigative activities between the two offices and this caused a great strain on him.

Father asked his friend Jack Cater<sup>36</sup> to be the general manager of the telephone company, but since Governor Sir Murray MacLehose needed Cater to head the ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption), which was established in 1974, the general manager's position went to F.L. Walker.

Father waited until the controversy was over and the company was back on its feet, and then he resigned. He expressed the view to Fei Yim-ing that, in time, people in Hong Kong would appreciate what he had done to improve the telephone system.<sup>37</sup>

Aside from the telephone, another important public utility for the people of Hong Kong was gas. In 1964, Father became the first Chinese chairman of the Hong Kong and China Gas Co., which had been established in 1862 to provide gas lighting to the colony. In 1975, Hong Kong Electric, which was controlled by Jardine, attempted to take over Hong Kong and China Gas. Father resisted. It became a high-profile takeover attempt that Father referred to as "a big fish swallowing a small fish."<sup>38</sup> He was constantly on the news explaining to the shareholders why they should not sell their shares to Hong Kong Electric, exposing the financial position of the latter which he believed would be detrimental to the shareholders of China Gas. Even though the Hong Kong and China Gas

Company was a much smaller company, he managed to show his shareholders how economically stable and profitable it was.<sup>39</sup>

In all of this, Father spent a great deal of time with two of his board members, the Honourable J.D. Clague, a *taipan* of the Hutchison Group, and Noel Croucher, a leading stockbroker who helped prevent the hostile takeover by advising his clients not to sell their shares to Hong Kong Electric.<sup>40</sup> By August 20, 1975, Father and the board of directors succeeded in preventing the takeover.

The gas company was originally registered in the United Kingdom. In 1982, Father, as chairman, made the decision to move the registration to Hong Kong. At the time of the transfer, only 2 of the 2,238 shareholders were registered on the London Register. Father explained to the shareholders that, while the company had always been at a disadvantage because it had to comply with British legislation, Britain's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 had resulted in an even greater degree of legislative control, most of which was inappropriate for a company operating in Hong Kong. At a cost of \$1.2 million, the company severed its ties with Britain. The ceremony was held in Hon Chiu's office in Sunning Plaza, and Hong Kong and China Gas became a Hong Kong company. To commemorate the event, all employees were presented with a one-ounce gold coin, and grants of \$250,000 each were made to the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Polytechnic.<sup>41</sup>

The Hong Kong and China Gas Company's profits rose from \$39 million in 1980 to \$235 million within six years, and it achieved the status of a major utility company after 125 years of operations. Gas was no longer the fuel of the wealthy, but an everyday necessity for the people of Hong Kong.

Since the 1970s, Father had worked towards obtaining natural gas from China, building pipelines under the ocean to Hong Kong. This would not only bring in foreign exchange for China, but would benefit the people of Hong Kong. Unfortunately, due to safety problems and engineering difficulties, his dream was not realized during his lifetime.<sup>42</sup>

After Father died, the Hong Kong and China Gas Company signed a joint memorandum with Qin Wencai, president of the China National

Offshore Oil Corporation in 1985, to bring natural gas to Hong Kong, at a date to be determined.<sup>43</sup> When this finally happened, it ushered in an era of cheaper gas for Hong Kong.

Hong Kong was such a dynamic place to do business that the well-known Rothschild Bank wanted to establish a bank in Hong Kong. Father was approached to be a founding director. In March 1973, N.M. Rothschild & Sons (Hong Kong) Limited was formed, and in January 1974, Father was appointed deputy chairman. Sir Evelyn de Rothschild was the chairman, but since he was not based in Hong Kong, Father chaired many of the meetings. Over time, the two became very good friends, and Sir Evelyn referred to Father as the first chairman of the bank in Hong Kong.

During Father's term as deputy chairman, 1974-78, he introduced potential business opportunities to the bank and assisted in the recruitment of local executives. Sir Evelyn wrote to me that Father was very keen on placing the following motto in Chinese in front of the bank office:

Devotion with zeal in Finance,  
Wealth is developed by the golden mean;  
Enterprise is all-embracing,  
Exchanges pervade the four seas;  
Assets abound in resources,  
Making fortunes by fair and honest dealing;  
Steering a course in economic growth,  
For the benefit of commerce and industry;  
With united and popular support,  
The outlook for prosperity is bright!<sup>44</sup>

Having an international outlook made it easy for Father to make friends and have business associations with people from all over the world, as with the Rothschild Bank. In a 1979 letter to Father, Sir Evelyn wrote:

... I was also very pleased to see that N.M.R. Hong Kong is doing so well and I know much of the success is due to your guiding hand, which is greatly appreciated. ....Again my grateful thanks to you for all the help and kindness you showed me....<sup>45</sup>

As mentioned before, Father had many friends, not only in Asia, but also all over Europe. His association with Messrs. A.P. Møller of Denmark began in the 1960s. The relationship grew stronger as time went on, and the company invested in many of Father's projects. The owner Mærsk McKinney Møller and Father became good friends.

When Per Jorgensen, managing director of Messrs. A.P. Møller,<sup>46</sup> arrived in Hong Kong in August 1977, he and Father also became good friends. By that time, the company already had three joint ventures with the Lee family: the Lee Gardens Hotel, and the office towers One Hysan Avenue and Leighton Centre. Jorgensen said that, at the time, his international corporate experience was limited, and Father took him under his wing and introduced him to the sophisticated corporate life and its procedures in Hong Kong. Father offered friendship, guidance and goodwill; Jorgensen appreciated Father's openness and dynamism, and his modern and efficient way of handling matters.<sup>47</sup>

My parents visited Denmark in July 1982 where they were the guests of Per Jorgensen and his wife. At the end of 1982, the chairman and CEO of A.P. Møller, Mærsk McKinney Møller, accompanied by his daughter Ane Uggle, visited my family in Hong Kong.<sup>48</sup>

A.P. Møller continued to be a great supporter of all Father's business undertakings, as in the Hysan Development Company and the Garden Hotel Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. Per Jorgensen became one of the first directors of Hysan Development Company.

Father had very wide interests in different kinds of businesses, so it is not surprising that he should have an indirect interest in Grand Marine Holdings Ltd., a Hong Kong shipping company that built many of their cargo vessels in Japan. The names of most of their ships started with the word "Grand," such as *Grand Eagle* and *Grand Jade*, the latter being named after Mother, whose Chinese name means jade.

Grand Marine was owned by Li Ping San, the father-in-law of Mother's niece Greta. Because of the family connection, Li asked Father to become the chairman of his company, and Father helped the family to take the company public in the 1970s.

My parents went to the launching of many of their ships in Japan, and for a number of years, the company's profits soared. Unfortunately, Li became very ill. Just before he died, he asked to see Father and made him promise to look after his two sons who would inherit the company.

After Li died, the sons sold the company to Carrian, an investment group headed by Malaysian-born businessman George S.G. Tan, for what they believed to be a large amount of money. Actually most of it was in the form of shares in the Carrian Group.

Since Father was not consulted, he decided to sell all his shares in the company and sever his ties with Grand Marine. This was fortunate, because the sale of Grand Marine eventually bankrupted the Li family. The original personal guarantees that Li Ping San had given to the banks were passed on to his sons even though the company had been sold.<sup>49</sup> In 1983, the collapse of the Carrian Group became the biggest corporate scandal ever in Hong Kong, when Malaysian banker Lorrain Osman and Tan were found guilty of defrauding Bumiputra Malaysia Finance Ltd. (BMFL) of \$6 billion (US\$769 million). BMFL was a subsidiary of Bank Bumiputra, the second largest bank in Malaysia.<sup>50</sup>

Father also had a western Canadian connection, in the area of oil exploration. In his speech in Frankfurt in June 1982, he said:

There is no doubt at all, in my mind, that Hong Kong can assist China in her oil exploration programme in many ways. The importance of Hong Kong to China is undeniable, but of course we all realize too that Hong Kong depends on China for her survival. Could the China offshore oil and gas tilt the balance of the industrial world one day?<sup>51</sup>

In the late 1970s, Ranger Oil of Calgary approached Father to form a company for oil exploration in China. Father at first declined the offer. The company then turned to a merchant bank in England, the Hambros Bank in London. Through Hambros's connection with Yao Kang, they tried to reach Father. The proposal was to set up an oil company that would have the rights to drill in the South China Sea, recognized to be rich with oil reserves. Thinking that it was a sound idea, Yao called Father, and the two men together decided that this would be good for China.

Father called a meeting with the Hon. Victor Lampson, a partner of Cazenove & Co.<sup>52</sup> of London, accompanied by David Lewis, a director of Hambros Bank, at the Lee Hysan Estate Company boardroom at One Hysan Avenue. Father agreed to the proposal, and invested US\$1 million in the company. He became the chairman of Canada & Oriental Oil Limited



(COOL) in 1981, and Yao Kang became one of the directors. There were many other investors, including some of Father's friends in Hong Kong.

Father believed that China had a rich oil reserve that had never been tapped. The drilling started in the South China Sea at the end of 1981 and the beginning of 1982. At that time, there were seven foreign oil companies drilling in the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea and near Hainan Island. Father described these developments as "one of the most important steps in the Four Modernisations of China."<sup>53</sup>

Between 1981 and 1984, thirty-five wells were drilled in the China Sea without success. Then world oil prices collapsed. Between 1986 and 1987, Ranger Oil bought back the shares from COOL and sold all the rigs. In the end, the company was liquidated. The prospect of COOL was based on the original survey from Ranger Oil.<sup>54</sup>

By 1981, Hong Kong was already importing 20 percent of its petroleum products from China. Father believed that China's reserves would have a tremendous economic impact on the world when they came on stream.<sup>55</sup> Despite the lack of success of COOL up to the time of his death, Father continued to have faith in China's offshore oil reserves.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Berta Manson in the "Empire Builders," a series that appeared in the *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> This was a new phenomenon in the early 1970s in Hong Kong, which culminated in the crash of 1973.

<sup>4</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, January 1, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> *South China Morning Post*, October 26, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

<sup>7</sup> For Chinese New Year, homes are decorated with budding peach or plum trees, in the same way that Christmas trees decorate the homes of Westerners. If the flowers open on New Year's Day, it is considered a sign of prosperity for that year.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, October 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, April 1, 1960.

<sup>12</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 19, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Opening speech of Hong Kong Tube & Metal Products, Ltd.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Violet Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>16</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, August 20, 1964.

<sup>17</sup> *Celebrity Monthly*, August 1979, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963.

<sup>19</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, January, February and April 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Father from the secretary of Victoria City Development Co. Ltd., January 6, 1964.

<sup>21</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, June 24, 1965.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The Chinese government was not planning to let political unrest spill over from China to Hong Kong.

<sup>25</sup> By 1997, the third cross-harbour tunnel was completed. Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Fei Yiming, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."

<sup>27</sup> This was also the turning point in the urban history of Hong Kong, the change from two cities into one.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, January 1996.

<sup>29</sup> He was chairman until December 1975, when G.R. Ross took over.

<sup>30</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 31, 1967.

<sup>31</sup> Jardine Fleming & Company Limited is a restricted licence bank, owned jointly by Jardine Matheson Holdings Limited and Robert Fleming Holdings Limited. Established in 1970, it was the first merchant bank in Hong Kong.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with David K. P. Lee, Hong Kong, November 1996.

<sup>33</sup> *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, March 31, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s when telephone lines were in chronically short supply, bribery was rampant, probably even institutionalized.

<sup>35</sup> Phone interview with Sir Jack Cater, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Jack Cater went to Hong Kong right after the war as part of the postwar military administration. He met Father at that time and they became good friends. His term as commissioner of ICAC actually started in October 1973 and lasted until October 1978, when he became chief secretary. He was subsequently knighted.

<sup>37</sup> Fei, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."

<sup>38</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, July 29, 1975.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., July and August 1975.

<sup>40</sup> Note from Hon Chiu Lee, Hong Kong, August 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Hutcheon, *The Blue Flame* (Hong Kong, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> Fei "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."

<sup>43</sup> Hutcheon, *Blue Flame*, p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, London, June 11, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Father from Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, London, December 4, 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Messrs. A.P. Møller was started in 1904 by Arnold Peter Møller with his father, Captain Peter Mærsk Møller, in Svendborg, Denmark, as a shipping company. In 1965, on the death of his father, Mærsk McKinney Møller assumed the leadership of the A.P. Møller Group, and the company developed into a major international enterprise. The Group consisted of Mærsk Line, Mærsk Tankers, Mærsk Drilling in the Danish part of the North Sea, Odense Steel Shipyard, Mærsk Container Industries, Mærsk Air, A/S Roulunds Fabriker for the production of fan belts and brake linings for European cars, Pharma-Plast for the production and sale of medical supplies, Mærsk Data for the supply and sale of data processing, Dansk Supermarked, the second largest supermarket chain in Denmark, and many more.

<sup>47</sup> Notes from Per Jorgensen, Copenhagen, June 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Neville and I were in Hong Kong at the time and had the pleasure of dining with them.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Greta Li, Vancouver, April 1997.

<sup>50</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 8, 1993.

<sup>51</sup> Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

<sup>52</sup> The company is based in London and is the only major securities business in the United Kingdom to have remained an independent partnership. In the past thirty years, the company has opened offices in eleven other financial centres. The one in Hong Kong was opened in 1974. Worldwide, the company has more than one thousand employees in three areas of business: corporate finance, institutional brokering and fund management. Yao Kang, Hong Kong, February 1998.

<sup>53</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, August 4, 1981.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Professor Paul Lin, who was the former vice-chancellor of the University of East Asia in Macao during the 1980s, Vancouver, April 1997; interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997. Both Prof. Lin and Yao Kang were directors of COOL.

<sup>55</sup> Lee, "The Importance of Hong Kong to China."

## CHAPTER 26

### **The Freemason: A Lifetime Commitment**

**F**or as long as I lived at home, I always heard about Father going to masonic meetings. These meetings were a mystery to me because Freemasonry was a close-knit society for men, although in later years it became more open.

Freemasonry is a system of morality based on the principles of brotherly love and charity — not only of money but also of the mind — truth and personal integrity. It is entirely non-political; political discussions are forbidden on its premises.<sup>1</sup> It is a bond of fellowship that unites its members all over the world. Despite the general misconception in Hong Kong that only the rich and powerful are members, it is actually open to every honest, free man over twenty-one years of age. A new mason is taught to be “exemplary in the discharge of his duties as a citizen of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Masons refer to one another as brothers, and Freemasonry is proud of its philosophy of making good men better.

With its basic teaching of charity, masonic philanthropy helps a great number of people worldwide. Masons run hospitals and look after the handicapped. They manage homes for seniors, provide scholarships and funds for research, and perform other public service for their communities.

Some scholars trace the origin of Freemasonry as far back as the Garden of Eden, others to the emperors of China, and others still to the emperor of Japan. In the Far East, two aspects of the oriental origin have been developed: the secret societies of China have many practices in common with Freemasonry, and Confucian rituals performed by the emperor of China to ensure continuance of the Mandate of Heaven also bear a close relationship to its ceremonials.<sup>3</sup>

Present-day Freemasonry originated with the stonemasons who built the great churches of Europe. They developed a society of masons, which took simple medieval legends based on the art of building, as well as sto-

ries from the Bible and folklore, and developed them into complex rituals capable of universal appeal. The process was formalized by the creation of Grand Lodges, which spread rapidly throughout Europe and North America, and, in just over forty years, reached the Far East. Freemasonry started in Hong Kong in the early 1800s. The Royal Sussex Lodge was established in 1845, and its daughter lodge, Zetland, was established eighteen months later.

Father's connection with the Freemasons started during his years in England when he was introduced to it by his guardian, Mr. Churchill. The concept of brotherly love, charity and truth appealed to him. It was highly probable that he would have been initiated in Apollo University Lodge No. 357, if Grandfather had not suddenly passed away.<sup>4</sup>

In January 1929, Father was initiated into the University Lodge of Hong Kong Chapter No. 3666. Masonry has a system of so-called "higher degrees," for which ordinary lodge members are qualified by experience. Father eventually became a member of every one of these that existed in Hong Kong before the Pacific War. His enthusiasm also led to a life-long commitment, culminating in his becoming the district grand master for Hong Kong and the Far East.

During the Second World War, when we lived in Chongqing, Father was such an enthusiastic mason that he took part in the revival of the Lodge Star of Southern China No. 2013, which originally met in Guangzhou. He was also a visitor of Fortitude Lodge, which the Grand Lodge of California had temporarily set up in Chongqing. Although these two lodges were located in the same city and were only a couple of miles apart, they were separated by the swift-flowing, bridgeless Yangtse River, which could rise forty feet within a couple of hours. Attending a meeting could mean spending a day to get back home.<sup>5</sup>

After the war, Father continued to be active with the Freemasons in Hong Kong. In 1950, he assumed the chairs of both the Lodge Star of Southern China (by then moved from Chongqing) and Concordia Mark Lodge. In 1951, he took the First Principal's Chair of the University Lodge. Around the same time, Zetland Hall, at 1 Kennedy Road, was under construction. As the district grand superintendent of works, a nominal office, Father took it seriously as he did everything else, and put his civil engineering training to work in daily visits to the site.<sup>6</sup> The new Zetland Hall was located right across from the steps that led to the lower entrance



of my school, St. Paul's Co-educational College, so Father wanted me to have lunch there. However, because women were not allowed in the lodge, I had to have my lunch in the kitchen! I did that just to please him.

In April 1961, Father was appointed the district grand master of Hong Kong and the Far East (formerly Hong Kong and South China) by the grand master of England, the Right Honourable Earl of Scarborough. The geographical jurisdiction was expanded to absorb the Masonic District of Japan,<sup>7</sup> which had been reduced to one lodge, and had been working as an unattached lodge answering directly to United Grand Lodge in London.

The moment Japan was under Father's district, he went to their installation in Kobe every January. Father was known to be at his mellowest at the festive boards that followed the Kobe installations. His enthusiasm was so catching that his masonic brothers, and later their wives, started to join him for the trip from Hong Kong, despite the chilly January weather in Japan. Their number increased to almost twenty by the time Father passed away, and the trip to Kobe had become a major annual event for the Hong Kong masons.<sup>8</sup> Father also made the journey with the Scottish district grand master to consecrate the beautiful Kirby Hall where the Kobe lodges met.

In his new position, Father inherited the difficult problem of the disposal of the masonic hall and its grounds in Yokohama, Japan, a dilemma which would take the next twenty years to resolve. The land had been owned by six English constitutional bodies which had operated in Yokohama before the Pacific War, but had not been revived afterwards. Members of the Scottish lodge and new masonic bodies which had been started by the occupation forces in Japan had used the hall and were deeply concerned at being left without a meeting place. However, they had no financial resources to purchase the property, even at a specially reduced price.

The matter was finally settled harmoniously in 1982. The site was sold to the City of Yokohama for a public park, and most of the funds were used to provide new premises, headed by the Scottish Lodge, Star in the East No. 640. The balance of the funds was to be administered by the English District for the endowment of Freemasons' Research Fellowships at the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>9</sup> With Father's interest in education and his special close

relationship with the two universities, this solution was of great personal satisfaction to him.

Even though Father was a member of the English Craft, he was a regular visitor to other jurisdictions with lodges in Hong Kong. The grand master of Ireland conferred honorary past mastership of the constitution upon him, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland made him an honorary deputy district grand master.

As the district grand master for twenty-one years, Father served the Freemasons with great dedication. There were fourteen lodges and four associated chapters in Hong Kong, each one with an installation once a year and an annual general meeting. He attended all the installations and chaired all the annual general meetings without fail. These were usually scheduled between October and April, and the dates were picked either when he was in Hong Kong or when he could fly back from wherever he might be in the world.

George Todkill, who was Father's director of ceremonies for many years, told me that Father was easy to work with because he always knew what he wanted. Being a prompt person, Father entered the hall at exactly twenty minutes past six in the evening, and at six-thirty, he was in his chair giving orders and running the meeting. At exactly ten-twenty, Todkill was instructed to end the meeting, no matter who was speaking at the time. A farewell toast was made, and while all were standing, he would conduct Father out of the hall to his car, although members who wished to stay to talk could do so. Father was one for early evenings because he was an early riser.

Father may have hoped for the revival of Freemasonry in mainland China. On several occasions, when he had friends and acquaintances visiting Hong Kong from China, he would invite them to private lunches at Zetland Hall. When asked, he would explain the nonpolitical nature of the order and show his guests the inside of the meeting rooms. In his travels in China, he visited four masonic halls of former lodges in South China, being careful to avoid any suggestion that he was trying to claim them back. He also made sure that books on Freemasonry which gave the correct view and history of the craft were available to officials in Beijing.<sup>10</sup> Giving the correct view was very important, for in 1974 an alleged exposé of Freemasonry was published for Chinese readers. The books described the Hong Kong lodges as foreigners' triad societies, and

compared Freemasonry to the Chinese triad. It attributed to Freemasonry many of the failings of the triads, and called it the “white men’s international triad society.”<sup>11</sup>

After Father passed away, people wondered whether the Chinese government would allow Freemasonry to continue in Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997. Yao Kang went to speak to the leaders in Beijing, stressing the fact that Father had been a mason all his life. He came away with confirmation from the Hong Kong-Macao office of the Chinese government that Freemasonry would be allowed to continue after 1997, as long as it abided by the Basic Law. The meetings would still be conducted in English. However, the society would have to be more open, since it was perceived as a secret society. This openness would also apply to its social and charitable work. Since masons always swear allegiance to the existing government, as of July 1, 1997, the Chinese government has been toasted instead of the British Crown.<sup>12</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Haffner, *The Craft in the East*, rev. ed. (Hong Kong, 1988), p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Masonic lodges were first introduced in Japan in the 1870s, and by the 1960s, the only one left was the Rising Sun Lodge.

<sup>8</sup> Haffner, *Craft in the East*, p. 425.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 362-64.

<sup>12</sup> District Grand Lodge of Hong Kong & the Far East, Spring Newsletter 1997, from the Deputy District Grand Master, W. Bro. Yao Kang.

## CHAPTER 27

### A Look into the Future

In the early 1980s, the Sino-British discussions about the hand-over were under way. The economy was on a downswing, and there was constant talk of emigration from Hong Kong because of a lack of confidence in the future of the colony. Many people left for countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The talk of the town was, "We've been refugees once; we don't want to be refugees again." Emigration became such a hot topic that there were even special magazines catering to potential emigrants.<sup>1</sup>

Statistically, the picture looked brighter for both China and Hong Kong. Between 1977 and 1982, the import of Chinese products into Hong Kong increased by almost 32 percent, at a value of \$29,510 million, and the export of products from Hong Kong to China increased by 187 percent. The large increase in the latter was due to the electricity provided by China Light & Power Company to Guangdong Province. The modest modernization program in China was already helping Hong Kong to re-emerge as an entrepôt.<sup>2</sup>

In 1981, the Hong Kong government finally introduced district board elections which became the first phase of a move to a more representative style of government. Because the British government was preparing to negotiate the future of Hong Kong with the Chinese government, they saw a need for the people of Hong Kong to have a greater say in their own domestic affairs.

Despite the jitters in Hong Kong, life went on as usual in my family, and Father maintained his everlasting faith in Hong Kong and in China. His view on the idea of "one country, two systems" was: "... the event will signal a new approach to international relationship. The foundation of this relationship will be based on the mutual respect of the two governments with the interest of all parties, including that of the local population, in mind."

His vision for the future, beyond July 1, 1997, was that “Hong Kong, as far as China is concerned, has a role to play in her modernization for many more years to come, far beyond 1997, provided that free enterprise tempered with social justice remains and that we will not be crippled by the introduction of slothful work ethics.”<sup>3</sup>

Father maintained that people in Hong Kong still made their living in the old-fashioned way — by working hard. He pointed out that, even though people said China depended on Hong Kong for large amounts of foreign exchange, where would Hong Kong be without China?<sup>4</sup> Since Hong Kong depended on China for food and water and a cheap labour force, he wondered why most people seemed oblivious to the fact that Hong Kong relied on China for its existence.

The biggest concern of the business community in Hong Kong, after the return of sovereignty to China in 1997, was whether it would be overtaken by Shanghai as the leading business centre and the gateway to China. There has always been competition between Shanghai and Hong Kong as commercial ports and, historically, Shanghai was the most important centre in China for foreign trade until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Father’s view was:

With the absence of foreign exchange control and very low taxation, Hong Kong is also one of the important centres for capital formation.... In order to retain our advantage permanently over other localities, such as Shanghai, we must devote all our resources to constantly upgrading our financial infrastructure and industrial technology.<sup>5</sup>

Father thought it preposterous that the delegation of British members of Parliament led by Edward Du Cann, who visited Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese government in 1982, should even suggest that the Chinese government begin “negotiations” with London.<sup>6</sup> He thought it was totally unrealistic to expect China to renew treaties that were obviously unequal. And since the People’s Republic of China had never recognized the Treaty of Nanking of 1842, and the Conventions of Peking of 1860 and 1898, China had already claimed sovereignty over Kowloon



and Hong Kong. This claim had never been formally rejected by the British. It was Father's belief that both sides regarded Hong Kong as part of China under British management until July 1, 1997.<sup>7</sup>

Father believed that the future of Hong Kong would depend, in part, on the population. If they remained productive and could serve a unique economic function for China and the world, he believed that a practical and sensible solution could be reached through dialogue before 1997. The solution had to be formulated more on the basis of mutual economic interest rather than on military power, political ideology or even international law. The most important factor was to perpetuate Hong Kong's independent economic status so that it could serve as one of the financial centres of the world, where modern technology and know-how could be transferred into China. In order to do so, laws and commercial practices in their existing forms needed to continue and the Hong Kong dollar had to remain freely convertible.<sup>8</sup>

Father ventured a few suggestions for the future government of Hong Kong:

... the Government of Hong Kong could perhaps be a modified form of the present system with a Governing Committee. Hong Kong would be an "Independent Special Zone" within China under the Chinese flag. The Headship of the Governing Committee to be taken in turn by a Chinese and a Briton, say, every three or four years. The modification should be introduced gradually before 1997 to prevent any shocks due to abrupt changes.... The Legislative Council would continue with some appointed members as an interim measure for a few years, after which the entire Council could perhaps be elected.... The Civil Service could, with careful planning, remain much the same as at present.<sup>9</sup>

In legal matters, Father recommended that the existing laws of Hong Kong, recognized worldwide, should continue to be enforced after 1997 with the consent of China. The final appeal for court cases would not go to Beijing or to London, but to a final court of appeal created in Hong Kong, and special arrangements would be made for English judges who

were members of the Privy Council to continue to assist Hong Kong with their services in a new capacity acceptable to China, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong.<sup>10</sup>

In financial matters, Father believed that Hong Kong had learnt a lesson from the disaster occasioned by the Exchange Fund and General Reserves being tied to sterling under colonial regulations. Since the diversification of the fund in 1972, Hong Kong had become the world's third largest financial centre. He said in 1982:

This advantage should be maintained with full vigour. I think that is one of the points the Chinese leaders had in mind when they spoke about preserving Hong Kong's present status. When the year of 1997 arrives, the Exchange Fund must not be transferred to London or to Beijing but should be kept locally at all times or at any other place which Hong Kong itself may determine. This will perpetuate the independence of the Hong Kong dollar and continue to strengthen the confidence in Hong Kong by the international commercial community.<sup>11</sup>

In a letter written to Father on July 14, 1981, Lord Lawrence Ka-doorie said:

When I look back to immediate post-war Hong Kong and see it today, I cannot fail to appreciate that it is due to the confidence and enterprise of people such as yourself and your family who have made this possible. We hope you both enjoy good health, long life and every happiness and that our friendship may continue for many more years to come.

In 1982, Father decided that he no longer wanted to go out on the *Atalanta*. He gave the launch to our long-time coxswain, Ho Ning, so that he could sell it and use the money to retire.<sup>12</sup> Ho had been with our family for a very long time, and had watched us and many of the grandchildren grow up.<sup>13</sup> On our visit to my parents that year, I could not believe that Father would ever give up his launch, which had been so dear to his heart for as long as I can remember. What I did not know was that his doctor had told him that he was suffering from hardening of the arteries, and

should no longer swim. It was just like Father to want to see Ho Ning happily retired during his own lifetime.

Father had always been proud of the fact that he had received good genes from his own mother, Second Grandmother. I often heard him talking proudly of his mother's alertness at a great old age, and I do believe that he thought he would also live a very long time.

In a letter to Horace Kadoorie on February 1, 1983, Father wrote:

It is most kind of you to have sent us the tangerines from your farm each year for the past many years. My mother, who very soon will be 98, always looks forward in receiving your tangerines for her altar. She is a Buddhist and is in very good health. She plays 4 rounds of mahjong every day as exercise...

Mother saw Father smiling to himself early one morning in 1983. When she asked him why, he said that he had dreamed of Grandmother (Father grew up in her household; she had passed away in 1956), and she was calling him to her.

In the early summer of 1983, Father's old friend Liao Chengzhi died. (Liao had been one of the organizers of the guerrilla resistance in Hong Kong before the Japanese invasion in 1941.) Father was the only person from Hong Kong invited to attend the funeral, which was held in Beijing. Since Liao was not only a good friend but someone Father had a great deal of respect for, he would not have missed the opportunity to pay his last respects.

On June 26, 1983, Fei Yiming saw Father on the top floor of the Beijing Hotel. Fei needed to write something down but did not have a pen. He borrowed Father's and happened to mention how well the pen wrote. When they said goodbye, Fei had no idea that it was to be the last time they would see each other.<sup>14</sup>

Beijing was very hot that summer, with a temperature of over 37 degrees Celsius (100°F). On the way back to Hong Kong, the plane was delayed for a few hours, and there was no air-conditioning at the airport. Father was finding it difficult to breathe.

When Father returned to Hong Kong, he did not feel well. He consulted his doctor who immediately sent him to St. Paul's Hospital. When he arrived at the admitting office, he was asked for an advance payment

of two thousand dollars as a deposit. Since Father never carried much cash, he had to phone his secretary, Anna, to get the money from Mother, with the strictest order that no one was to be told that he was being admitted into hospital, not even his brothers.<sup>15</sup>

That day, all the Lee brothers at the Lee Hysan Estate office were wondering where Father was, because he had never missed a day of work in his life. Anna could only say that he was not coming in. However, when the head supervisor at the hospital, Sir Albert Rodrigues, made his rounds, he saw Father, and he told the Lee brothers. The following day, they scolded Anna for not telling them.

The doctor ordered Father to rest which for Father was an impossible task. Mother hired a private nurse for him, but he sent her away because he never liked anyone fussing about him. He gave the order that very few people should be told, since he expected to be home soon. Mother was not even allowed to tell us. Besides, he never took illness seriously. None of us knew that he had even been in the hospital until after he passed away.

Among the very few visitors he had were Xinhua News Agency Director Xu Jiatun and his deputy, Li Chuwen, who went to see him on July 2. In the meantime, after only three days in hospital, Father kept threatening to leave. Mother thought that Director Xu might have some influence and asked him to persuade Father to stay a few more days. Xu and Li found Father waiting in a chair to receive them when they entered his hospital room. Father said that he was feeling fine, and that everyone worried too much.<sup>16</sup> He gave his doctor an ultimatum: either he was to be discharged or he would check himself out of hospital, despite the fact that he was still being given oxygen. It was the morning of July 5.

A luncheon in honour of Director Tucker of the Water Department, who was retiring, was scheduled for that day at the Lee Gardens Hotel, and Father insisted on hosting it, even though arrangements had already been made for the secretary of the China Gas Company to take his place. Before the luncheon, he asked Anna to prepare all the cheques that needed to be signed and take them to the hotel. When Anna saw him, she thought he did not look well, and noted that he was speaking more slowly than usual. When she told Aunt Violet, who was still working in the Lee Hysan Estate office, Aunt Violet said, "If he wanted to leave hospital, no one could stop him!"

The next morning, July 6, Father had his usual breakfast in the pantry. He got up from the table to get dressed for the office and, as he walked out of the pantry, he collapsed. An ambulance was called, but he was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

When Anna went to work that morning, she walked past Tower Court as usual because she lived opposite us. Our watchman/chauffeur, Ah Lay, said to Anna, "Mr. Lee is gone." Not realizing what he meant, Anna asked, "Where did he go?" His eyes became red as he started to cry. Anna found it difficult to believe and was walking around in a daze when she bumped into Hon Chiu who had just come out of Caroline Mansion, diagonally opposite Tower Court. She asked him what she should do, and he said, "Just go back to the office." Even months afterwards, Anna found it difficult to accept Father's death, and kept thinking that he would be back. She would look out the window expecting to see him coming back to the office after having his customary lunch at home.<sup>17</sup>

A friend of mine from Toronto was visiting Hong Kong; she got into a taxi on the morning of July 6, and the taxi driver told her that Hong Kong had lost a very fine man that morning. She asked who it was, and realized that it was my father who had passed away.

At seven o'clock that evening, Yao Kang arrived at the airport from Los Angeles. He was in shock when his driver told him that Father had passed away. He said to himself, "What am I going to do now? All my China connections are gone."<sup>18</sup>

After dinner on the evening of July 5, in Toronto,<sup>19</sup> I received a phone call from Seventh Uncle telling me that Father had just passed away. I was completely dumbfounded. We had not known that Father had been unwell and was admitted to hospital, even though he had not stayed long. Besides, everyone expected him to be around forever.

Telegrams poured in to Mother from all over the world. Those from President Li Xiannian, Yang Shangkun, Xi Zhongxun, Gu Mu, Yu Qiuli, Ji Pengfei, Jing Puchun and Liao Mengxing were reported in the Chinese newspapers.

Thousands of people, from every level of society, came to pay their respects to Father in the great hall of the Hong Kong Funeral Home; immediate family as well as the rest of the Lee family members were there to greet and thank them. On the first day of the ceremony, immediate family members were told to be there especially early to receive a few



members of the Hong Kong Legislative and Executive Council, because they had to be on their way to Beijing that morning for talks on the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China.

I remember how significant Father was even in death, because his coffin was surrounded by wreaths and large flower panels from important personalities who had a stake in the peaceful transition of sovereignty of Hong Kong; in particular, the one from President Li Xiannian was on his right, and the one from the governor of Hong Kong was on his left.

One day in July, three pens like the one Fei Yiming had borrowed from Father at the Beijing Hotel arrived at Fei's office at *Ta Kung Pao*. He was very moved that Father, even though he had not been well, had instructed his secretary to send them to him.<sup>20</sup>

In honour of Father's position as district grand master of Hong Kong and the Far East, a memorial service was to be held by the masons for him on July 18 at St. John's Cathedral. Neville had to return to Toronto to attend to his patients, so our eldest son, Ashley, flew to Hong Kong to take his father's place. For that particular service, Mother decided that all female family members had to be in black cheongsams, and all the grandsons in black suits. I don't know where our relatives found the tailors, but these garments were made to order within forty-eight hours.

The day of the memorial service was very hot and sunny, and the cathedral was filled. The eulogy was given by the Honourable Mr. Justice Cons. In relating Father's life, he said that charity, which was the distinguishing virtue of a Freemason, was prominent in Father's life. One of his first acts as district grand master had been to reassess the existing practices for the collection and distribution of charity in the district, and to place the responsibility in the hands of the District Board of Benevolence, an organization in which he took the keenest interest. Father, he said, was more than a very successful businessman and a man of many talents; he was, first and foremost, a philanthropist of great generosity who inspired others to contribute. Father's favourite scripture reading in masonic ceremonies was St. Paul's paean to charity.<sup>21</sup> Father was described as a man of infinite charm who never failed to arouse an affectionate response in those with whom he came into contact. His leadership and quiet authority inspired confidence and enthusiasm in others. He was quick to praise, but he did not hesitate to criticize whenever he felt a proper effort had not been made. And, he never lost compassion for his fellow men.<sup>22</sup>

Another memorial service was held on October 8, by the Freemasons in Kobe, Japan, at St. Andrew's Chapel, the Flying Angel. A telegram of condolence from the mayor of Kobe, Tatsuo Miyazaki, was read. When Deputy District Grand Master Christopher Haffner gave the eulogy, he mentioned that Father had always looked upon Rising Sun Lodge in Kobe with special favour, for this was the lodge that first responded to his plea to endow medical research fellowships in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Grand Lodge of England. Haffner mentioned Father's relationship to the leaders of China, and noted that he had been the first Hong Kong resident to be received by the new Chinese President, Li Xian-nian. He said that Father's common-sense approach to the practicalities of Hong Kong's 1997 problem would be sorely missed.<sup>23</sup>

Father's secretary, Anna, had a number of offers of well-paid positions because she had worked for Father for more than twelve years, and presumably knew a great deal and had a lot of contacts, but she turned them all down. To her, Father was irreplaceable. She kept a small photograph of him smiling, which she said was his best, as well as some of his papers, a few of which were copies of the Chinese letters she had written on his behalf. She said these were souvenirs, and she very kindly handed the papers over to me to use as references for this book. Anna described Father as a man not without faults, but kind, honest, upright, and always a gentleman.

Father's death was covered widely in both Chinese and English newspapers, as well as on television and radio. Father's sisters immediately disconnected Second Grandmother's television set, which she watched frequently, in order to keep the news from her, and told her that it was out of order. Since she was illiterate, she did not read newspapers. She seldom went out in her later years, and the family and servants were instructed not to mention Father's death to her. For a number of years afterwards, whenever she asked why her eldest son did not come to see her, Mother made some kind of excuse, and after a while, she stopped asking. We believe she knew, but did not want to have her fears confirmed.

It was Father's wish that his ashes be scattered in the Hong Kong harbour, where he felt he belonged. Mother, in her old-fashioned way, refused to follow his wishes because she wanted to be buried next to him.

Father, always referred to by everyone respectfully in Chinese as "big brother," was greatly missed. During the writing of this book, I received

a tremendous amount of help and cooperation because there was still so much love and respect for him. He was referred to as a “great man,” a “good friend” and even a “legend.” Many remembered him with gratitude and appreciation. Others lamented that his death was a blow to the Sino-British talks over the sovereignty of Hong Kong.

Even in death, as demonstrated by his funeral, Father built bridges for China and for Hong Kong, bringing peace and prosperity.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The economic recession in North America in the early 1980s deterred potential emigrants. However, after 1986, with Xu Jiatun’s opposition to elections in Hong Kong and with economic upturn in North America, emigration became massive.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, “The Importance of Hong Kong to China.”

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The United Kingdom and People’s Republic of China delegations agreed at the United Nations in 1971 to remove Hong Kong from the United Nations’ list of colonies. Talks on Hong Kong were to be carried out bilaterally.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, “The Importance of Hong Kong to China.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> I met the brother of the person who bought the *Atalanta* in June 1997, in Hong Kong. His name is Ah Ming and he is the coxswain of R. G. Ross, chairman of Deacon & Co. I learnt that, for a number of years, the *Atalanta* was available for hire for launch picnics. I also learnt that Ho Ning, in his later years, became the big brother for all the young men who wanted to work towards being coxswains for the wealthy.

<sup>13</sup> By the time he came to work for us my older brother, Richard, and sister, Deanna, had already gone to England to study.

<sup>14</sup> Fei, “Mian Huai Li Ming Ze.”

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Xu Jiatun, *Xu Jiatun Xianggang Huiyi Lu* (Xu Jiatun’s Hong Kong Memoirs), (Hong Kong, 1993), p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Anna Li, Los Angeles, Spring 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Yao Kang, Hong Kong, June 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Hong Kong is twelve hours ahead of Toronto in the summer because of daylight saving time.

<sup>20</sup> Fei, "Mian Huai Li Ming Ze."

<sup>21</sup> Haffner, *Craft in the East*, pp. 424-25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

## Epilogue

**I**n honour of Father, Deng Yingchao, the widow of Premier Zhou Enlai, nominated Mother as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, representing Hong Kong in China.

Mother often said, "Even though your father was such an impatient man, and so rigid in his ways, I really can't complain about him because he treated me so well." She had always been regarded with great respect and importance in Father's life. In his tradition of great generosity, whenever he made an investment, he automatically put half in Mother's name. Since he was so honest and straightforward, she came to rely on him completely, and depended on him for all decisions, solutions to all problems, even looking after household bills and her travel arrangements.

Mother had always assumed that she would die first, and not only was saddened and completely lost when Father died, but felt insulted that she was left behind. It took her months to be taken off sedatives, but at the age of seventy-four, she did her best to carry on.

As for me, I wish I had been able to spend more time with Father. I wish I had asked many more questions than I did, but then I too expected him to be around for a very long time. I learned from the examples he set, and try to live up to his standard. The fact that he always made it known that he cared will be with me forever. I thank him for the good name he left me with, and I am very proud to be his daughter.



















Born of an encounter during the Opium War between imperial Britain and China's last dynasty, Hong Kong's story is vividly told through the life of one man—Richard Charles Lee—and his immediate family. This is not only an intimate portrait of a man who played a pivotal role in the years leading up to the handover in 1997—it is also a revealing look at the former British colony from its earliest days until now, when it is a Chinese Special Administrative Region.”

**Frank Ching**, author of “ANCESTORS: 900 Years in the Life of a Chinese Family” and “China and Hong Kong: For Better or For Worse.”

The story of Hong Kong's Lee Hysan Family is, in many ways, the story of Hong Kong. This intimate portrait provides a rich and insightful depiction of the remarkable contributions made by the family members to Hong Kong's development over different periods of modern history. There is a special focus on “grandfather,” “father” and “mother,” those whom author Vivienne Poy knew best. Readers will also gain an appreciation of the spirit in which Poy herself has offered dedicated service to Canadian society as a Senator, University Chancellor, successful business woman and sponsor of countless charitable initiatives. This is a book that will inspire the mind and nurture the heart for all who read it.

**Ruth Hayhoe**, Professor, University of Toronto;  
President emerita, The Hong Kong Institute of Education.

This is a moving and evocative study of Hong Kong's recent history. Vivienne Poy captures the richness and the complexity of this history through the study of her own remarkable family, the Lee family. She shows how the family, and in particular her father, Lee Ming Chak, steered a steady course through often turbulent times. He was both innovative and grounded, his creativity based on a secure set of values that allowed him to come through the many trials of modern Chinese history without compromising or losing hope. The book goes beyond family history; it is a daughter's tribute to her father, and to the loving relationship they shared.

**Diana Lary**, Professor of History, University of British Columbia.

Profit in business; victory in wars; and the sharpness of a blade. These, we are told, are the meanings of the Chinese surname Lee, whose Hong Kong branch and their history is the subject of this fascinating book. Add that the character “lee” can also mean “wit” and, in a frequently used phrase, “to be devoted to others without thought for self,” and one gets some idea of the influence and dedication of this family - sometimes called the “Hysan” Lees after the author's grandfather, who built up a highly successful real estate business in Hong Kong in the 1920s. Add again the role played in building sustained links between Hong Kong's different and sometimes mutually distant communities, as well as between Hong Kong and the Mainland of China, and one can see that this highly readable account of the Lee family is a microcosm of Hong Kong's history, struggles and successes over the past hundred years or more.

Hong Kong is nothing if not an international city. How right that a present-day Lee, the author Vivienne Poy, is also the first person of Asian descent to be appointed a Canadian Senator. The Lee magic continues.

**David Wilson** (Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge University, and a former Governor of Hong Kong).